

Italian Quarterly

2

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Italian Quarterly

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Dante Alighieri: *Purgatory*, V.

translated by

JOHN CIARDI

[The *virtuoso* of today, in the humanistic sense, seems mostly to be found in the universities. He may well cut a multiple figure of poet-critic-lecturer. His several activities would not merely list pursuits successively taken up and dropped; rather, they would be the direct consequence of his competence in a single craft — in the present instance, poetry. For Mr. Ciardi regularly teaches at Rutgers University and has published essays in the criticism of poetry. But he is mostly a poet, and it is in that capacity that he renders his fellow poet Dante into modern English. He has, of course, already published his version of the *Inferno*, which has sold very well in a paper-bound edition (the consequences of this for Dante and for poetry seem immense); beside it on the rack we may hope soon to see the *Purgatory*. In the meantime, here is Canto V of the work in progress, the canto of the “late repentent violently slain”: Jacopo del Cassero, Buonconte da Montefeltro, and la Pia.

Mr. Ciardi has communicated to the Editors the following statement: “The present draft is not final. I am aware of some of the faults in it, and there must certainly be others I am not yet aware of, but I hope to catch. I will certainly welcome any criticism your readers can make, the more severe the better.”]



I was walking in the footsteps of my Guide,
having already parted from those shades,
when someone at my back pointed, and cried:

“Look at the left side of that lower one!
The arrows of the sun do not strike through him!
He walks as if he still wore flesh and bone!”

I looked behind me to see who had spoken,
and I saw them gazing up at me alone,
at me, and at the light, that it was broken.

At which my Master said: “Why do you lag?
What has so turned your mind that you look back?
What is it to you that idle tongues will wag?”

Follow my steps though whispers buzz about you:
be as a tower of stone that holds its crown
firm to the sky whatever winds may blow.

For when a man lets his attention range
through every wisp, he loses true direction,
sapping his mind's force with continual change."

What could I say except "I come"? I said it
flushed with that hue that sometimes asks forgiveness
for which it shows the asker to be fit.

Meanwhile across the slope a bit before us
people approached chanting the *Miserere*
verse by verse in alternating chorus.

But when they noticed that I blocked the course
of the sun's arrows when they struck my body,
their song changed to an "Oh!", prolonged and hoarse.

Out of that silenced choir two spirits ran
like messengers, and, reaching us, they said:
"We beg to know — are you a living man?"

My Guide replied: "You may be on your way.
And bear back word to those who sent you here
he does indeed still walk in mortal clay.

If, as I think, it was his shadow drew them
to stand and stare, they know already. Tell them
to honor him: that may be precious to them."

I never saw hot vapors flashing through
the first sweet air of night, nor through the clouds
of August sunsets, faster than those two

ran up to join their band, wheeled round again,
and, with the whole band following, came toward us,
like cavalry sent forward with a loose rein.

"There are hundreds in that troop that charges so,"
my Guide said, "and all come to beg a favor.
Hear them, but press on, listening as you go."

"Pure spirit," they came crying, "you who thus
while still inside the body you were born to
climb to your bliss — oh, pause and speak to us.

Is there no one here you recognize? Not one
of whom you may bear tidings to the world?
wait! won't you pause? oh please! why do you run?

We all are souls who died by violence,
all sinners to our final hour, in which
the lamp of Heaven shed its radiance

into our hearts. Thus from the brink of death,
repenting all our sins, forgiving those
who sinned against us, with our final breath

we offered up our souls at peace with Him
who saddens us with longing to behold
his glory on the throne of Seraphim."

"O well-born souls," I said, "I can discover
no one among you whom I recognize
however much I search your faces over;

but if you wish some service of me, speak,
and if the office is within my power
I will perform it, by that peace I seek

in following the footsteps of this Guide
who makes me go with him from world to world
to my own good." I paused, and one replied:

"No soul among us doubts you will fulfill
all you declare, without your need to swear it,
if lack of power does not defeat your will.

I, then, who am no more than first to plead,
beg that if ever you see that land that lies
between Romagna and Naples, you speak my need

most graciously in Fano, that they to heaven
send holy prayers to intercede for me;
so may my great offences be forgiven.

I was of Fano, but that wounds that spilled
my life's blood and my soul at once were dealt me
among the Antenori. I was killed

where I believed I had the least to fear.
Azzo of Este, being incensed against me
beyond all reason, had me waylaid there.

Had I turned toward La Mira when they set
upon me first outside of Oriaco,
I should be drawing breath among men yet.

I ran into the swamp, and reeds and mud
tangled and trapped me. There I fell. And there
I watched my veins let out a pool of blood."

Another spoke: "So may the Love Divine
fulfill the wish that draws you up the mountain,
for sweet compassion lend your aid to mine.

I was di Montefeltro and am now
Buonconte only. Since my own forget me,
I go with these who walk with lowered brow."

And I: "What force or chance led you to stray
so far from Campaldino that your grave
remains to be discovered to this day?"

And he: "There flows below the Casentino
a stream, the Archiana, which arises
above the Hermitage in Appenino.

There where its name ends in the Arno's flood
I came, my throat pierced through, fleeing on foot
and staining all my course with my life's blood.

There my sight failed. There with a final moan,
which was the name of Mary, speech went from me,
I fell, and there my body lay alone.

I speak the truth. Oh speak it in my name
to living men! God's angel took me up,
and Hell's cried out: 'Why do you steal my game?

If his immortal part is yours, brother,
for one squeezed tear that makes me turn it loose,
I've got another treatment for the other.'

You are familiar with the way immense
watery vapors gather on the air,
then burst as rain, as soon as they condense.

To ill will that seeks only ill, his mind
added intelligence, and by the powers
his nature grants, he stirred the mist and wind.

From Pratomagno to the peaks, he spread
a mist that filled the valley by day's end;
then turned the skies above it dark as lead.

The saturated air changed into rain
and down it crashed, flooding the rivulets
with what the sodden earth could not retain.

The rills merged into torrents, and a flood
swept irresistibly to the royal river.
The Archiano, raging froth and mud,

found my remains in their last frozen rest
just at its mouth, swept them into the Arno,
and broke the cross I had formed on my breast

in my last agony of pain and guilt.
Along its banks and down its bed it rolled me,
and then it swathed and buried me in silt."

A third spoke when that second soul had done:
"When you have made your way back to the world
and found your rest from this long road you run,

oh speak my name again with living breath
to living memory. Pia am I.
Siena gave me birth; Maremma, death;

as he well knows who took me as his wife
with jeweled ring before he took my life."

The Last Stories of Giovanni Verga

by

GIOVANNI CECCHETTI

[The excellent translations of Giovanni Verga's major novels have made this writer well known in the English speaking world as Italy's greatest novelist of the realistic school. However, and for exactly opposite reasons, the short stories of this author have remained almost completely unknown in the rather disappointing versions which they have so far had in English. This situation will be remedied, we believe, by the appearance of *The She-Wolf and Other Stories*, a translation of fourteen selected short stories of Verga by Giovanni Cecchetti, to be published in the winter by the University of California Press.

Professor Cecchetti has been teaching Italian at the University of California in Berkeley for the past several years and will join the faculty of Tulane University in the fall. His chief interest is modern Italian literature and, along with numerous articles, he has published a monograph on Pascoli (*La Poesia del Pascoli*, Pisa; Libreria Goliardica Editrice, 1954). *Donna Santa's Sin* will be part of the above mentioned collection, *The She-Wolf and Other Stories*, and appears here for the first time in an English version. Professor Cecchetti's notes on the last stories of Verga, immediately preceding his translation, throw new light on the period in which *Donna Santa's Sin* was written, the last active years of Verga as a writer.]

The English-speaking readers of Italian literature know of four books by Giovanni Verga: two novels—*I Malavoglia* (*The House by the Medlar Tree*) and *Mastro Don Gesualdo*—and two volumes of short stories—*Vita dei Campi* (*Cavalleria Rusticana and Other Stories*) and *Novelle Rusticane* (*Little Novels of Sicily*). These four books are unquestionably Verga's masterpieces, the ones which have placed him among the great European writers of the last century. They were all written between 1878 (the approximate date when Verga began to work seriously on *I Malavoglia*, after having thought about the subject for three years) and 1889, when the second and final version of *Mastro Don Gesualdo* was published.

In this period Verga's creativity was at its peak. Before then, during his youth, he had devoted himself to writing sentimental novels mostly dealing with love affairs between hot-blooded southern Italian men transplanted in the Florentine aristocratic world and the sexually rapacious women whom they were pursuing. These works are now read mainly by scholars who want to delve into his formative years.

After *Mastro Don Gesualdo* he brought out two volumes of short stories: *I Ricordi del Capitano d'Arce* ("Captain d'Arce's Memoirs") and *Don Candeloro e Compagni* ("Don Candeloro & Co."). Except for a short novel of no great importance printed in 1906, they are his last two books. If we further take into account the fact that some of the stories contained in the first had already appeared in 1884 under a different title, then *Don Candeloro e Compagni* becomes the only collection written by Verga after his second great novel, *Mastro Don Gesualdo*, and before he abandoned narrative art almost completely.

The critics have generally neglected *Don Candeloro e Compagni*. A few mention it in their monographs, but for the purpose of acknowledging its existence rather than of appraising its significance.¹ It undoubtedly deserves more attention than it has been given so far.

The book is uneven, but some of the stories are very good. In them one still finds the hand of the man who had written so many masterpieces about the lives and the struggles of poor Sicilians, and one is reminded of both his unmistakable way of portraying humanity and his uniquely unadorned and direct style.

The first two short stories of *Don Candeloro e Compagni* are connected to the extent of being two chapters of the same story. The protagonist is Don Candeloro, the owner of a puppet show; he lives in a remote Sicilian town and manages to make his living with his puppets. But slowly he begins to lose his public; the people's imaginations cannot be satisfied simply with puppets: what they want is real actors and succinctly dressed actresses. Soon Don Candeloro begins to travel from town to town, taking along his show and his family. But nowhere, not even in the most dis-

tant villages, does he find the attention and the sympathy he needs. Finally, in order to please the public and to earn his daily bread, he decides to become a clown. But the public still scorns him. Meanwhile, his daughter runs away with his helper and apprentice, Martino. Don Candeloro does all he can to defend the reputation of his family, but slowly the material necessities of life make him indulgent and at the end he finds himself eating at the tables of his daughter's occasional lovers.

The two stories are tight and powerful. Verga presents his people in the hands of a ruthless destiny that never relaxes its grip. They are the real puppets, whose movements are always determined by a superior and inescapable force: the necessity of survival, for which they struggle with all the means at their disposal. The puppet show is therefore the counterpart of the characters, and at the same time it can be viewed as the symbol of all mankind.

The first part of the book contains also two stories dealing with big-city actresses: "*La Serata della Diva*" ("The Star's Great Night") and "*Il Tramonto di Venere*" ("The Setting of Venus"). They are related in the sense that they portray two strikingly different periods in an acting career. The stars have their short hour of fame, but life cannot be a continuous triumph and success is quickly followed by the long hours of misery. The great star who once seemed to be the mistress of her destiny, now, while she clings to all possible means of survival, reveals her true identity: like everybody else, she has been vanquished by life.

In what one can call the second part, the volume has many other noteworthy characters and "scenes:" an ambitious peasant who, by his Machiavellian shrewdness, becomes first a friar and then the head of a monastery in order to be able to rule others and behave the way he wants to ("*Papa Sisto*"); the turmoil caused among the nuns by two handsome priests who have come to preach in their convent ("*L'Opera del Divino Amore*"); a girl who is forced to become a nun and slowly convinces herself that she has done so of her own free will ("*La Vocazione di Suora Agnese*"); the effect of the exaggerations of a histrionic

preacher on a narrow-mindedly religious woman who is expecting a child, and consequently on her husband ("Il Peccato di Donna Santa"); and other lesser stories.

The whole book is intended to represent various human dramas as they develop in different environments, or, rather, on the different stages of the theater of life. As a conclusion Verga wrote a piece consisting of a series of sketches tied together by the same idea. At the beginning he states: "How often in the dramas of life, fiction is so mixed with reality as to be confused with it and to become tragic, and the man who is forced to play his part becomes deeply identified with it, just as if he were a great actor." This concept was later to become one of the basic principles of Pirandello's theater. It is very doubtful that Pirandello derived his philosophy from Verga's last book of stories, yet we could almost say that the former began where the latter left off.

In all of Verga's mature works, the characters are slowly overcome and destroyed by life, by their needs, their passions, and their ambitions. The Malavoglias are victims of an inexorable fate that they themselves help to create, and so is Mastro Don Gesualdo, who dies in the desperate solitude which seems to be the natural end of all his labor and his toiling. And so are the protagonists of the short stories, who are generally led to their destruction by their own actions.

In *Novelle Rusticane*, the best of Verga's collections of stories, circumstances bring about not only the misery of the people but also the progressive disintegration of their moral values, which are their strongest defense. Slowly everything seems to collapse under the weight and the pressure of everyday needs. The same happens fairly often in *Don Candeloro e Compagni*.

Verga's conception of life is characterized by a virile pessimism, which stems directly from his realism and embraces all human manifestations. His people are constantly striving to improve their material conditions, but in so doing they sink into deeper misery. If they are sustained by dreams, these dreams are inevitably submerged by the waves of reality. In his last book his conception of life is still gloomier, because it begins to lose its dynamism. The un-

avoidable and unchangeable conclusions often weigh heavily on his stories from the very beginning. This might be a reason why Verga, after *Don Candeloro e Compagni*, could not continue writing; his work was finished.

From Verga's pessimistic version of life springs his humor. It is a bitter humor, which in his greatest works generates deep human compassion; in other instances, instead, it appears motionless, something like the gelid smile of a man who observes human events with impassive eyes.

In *Don Candeloro e Compagni* there is this kind of humor, and it is such that at times it borders on cynicism. Some of the stories ("Papa Sisto" and "L'Opera del Divino Amore") have a Boccacesque flavor, but they lack the warm laughter of Boccaccio: Verga views the various happenings with too much detachment, and as a consequence his characters tend to acquire the qualities of caricatures; they are really like the marionettes of Don Candeloro's puppet show.

"Il Peccato di Donna Santa" ("Donna Santa's Sin"), which is presented here in English for the first time, is a combination of social satire and psychological analysis, and certainly stands as one of the best stories of the book. The first part, in which the author portrays the whole village in church and gives brief sketches of the lives and inclinations of so many people, is a remarkable piece in itself. One cannot help admiring the ease with which Verga handles a great mass of characters at once. On the other hand, some readers may feel that the satirical element is so prevalent that it seems to have become the only preoccupation of the writer. And there is a certain disproportion between the introductory part and the rest, which actually constitutes the story; in fact the main character, Doctor Brocca, appears a little too late.

The second part is centered around the mental sufferings of the Doctor, who suspects he has been cuckolded by his unattractive wife, but cannot obtain a confession. Again one may have the impression that the author is ridiculing his character, rather than inspiring deep human sympathy and compassion, as he does in his great works. "Donna Santa's Sin" is a sort of jest: Doctor Brocca is deceived, since the sin does not exist, and has to carry the cross of a

man who thinks that he is, and is believed to be, dishonored. There is something Pirandellian about this conclusion: what counts is not what we really are, but what we think we are or are thought to be.

The theme of poverty and of the resulting struggle for survival, as well as the theme of the compulsive desire for earthly possessions, which provide the common ground for almost all of Verga's best known narratives, are absent from the story. There is, however, the theme of conjugal honor, and therefore of the supreme necessity of defending what to a southern Italian is more important than daily bread and property. This theme had produced swift and powerful tragedies in "*Cavalleria Rusticana*" and in "*Jeli il Pastore*" ("*Jeli, the Shepherd*"). Here it is treated rather sardonically, and in such a different way that comparison is not possible.

In Verga, as in all true writers, the question of style is particularly important. He declared that short stories and novels should appear as if they had created themselves, and the presence of the author should remain completely undiscoverable. This was the theory of the impersonality of art; it came to Verga from his faith in realism, which he believed to be the only road to literary creation. Actually, however, realism was for him an external stimulus to discover himself and to realize his potentialities. Even if impersonality cannot exist, that principle helped him to free himself from all the superficialities of his early novels and to create a profoundly original style.

After 1874, he worked for years trying to develop a prose which should be one and the same with the people he portrayed and in which nothing should derive from virtuosity or stylistic brilliance; every word was to be indispensable and originate directly in the inner world of the characters. Thus he eliminated descriptive passages and adopted a vocabulary that is comparatively limited and generally popular in quality — but every expression is newly enriched with suggestive meanings each time it occurs. Above all, he had his characters "*narrate themselves*," that is, he told the story in their own words.

One of the main characteristics of Verga's style is the continuous use of what today is technically called *style indirect libre*, or "free indirect style." Whenever he mentions a person he also repeats that person's words, merely placing the tenses in the past and without other changes. It would be enough to recall, by way of example, the paragraphs in "Donna Santa's Sin" where the thoughts and words of Doctor Brocca automatically become the substance of the narration, without any direct indication that he is thinking or speaking. It is preferable, however, to quote another passage, which reproduces the thoughts of a minor character, Donna Orsola, in her own words; starting with "since," at least, we are listening to her comments:

Donna Orsola held her nose, disgusted by the scandal that Caolina brought to church, since for women of that sort men neglect even the sacrament of matrimony and let your daughters grow moldy at home; and then there are the other troubles that come from all this: the girls, who to help themselves even latch on to a penniless tramp without ways or means, like Nini Lanzo; the men with families, who still go gallivanting when they are fifty years old . . .

By making such an extensive use of "free indirect style," Verga gave his narration an exceptional vivacity, and at the same time made all the details extremely concrete. But this is only one of the main characteristics of a prose that at every reading discloses new richness and depth.² The writers of our century have adopted and expanded many of the devices that had been employed by Verga; and this renders his prose still more vital.

It must be said that although Verga's last stories do not measure up to his masterpieces and do not possess their extraordinary insight and poetic power, they are not only good but also worthy of a great writer.

NOTES

- (1) The only critic who has devoted an article to *Don Candeloro e Compagni* is Attilio Momigliano: cf. *Giornale d'Italia*, 27 gennaio 1922 (the article was later reprinted in *Impressioni di un Lettore Contemporaneo*, Milano: Mondadori, 1928, pp. 189-196).
- (2) For a more detailed analysis of Verga's style, I take the liberty of referring to my study "Aspetti della Prosa di 'Vita dei Campi,'" *Italica*, XXXIV (1957), pp. 30-42.

Donna Santa's Sin

by

GIOVANNI VERGA

This time, to shake up those mules who actually had to be dragged to the sermon by the harness and who then went and behaved worse than before, the Lenten preacher thought up a good stunt, and if that wasn't going to help, sermons or preaching would all be like flinging words to the wind. He had the sacristan and two or three others, whom he had earlier taught their roles, hide in the old tomb under the floor of the church, and he said:

"Leave it to me."

The sermon on hell happened to be scheduled for the end of the mission, and the church was packed with people; some had come for one reason, some for another, some by order of the judge (for at that time fear of God was taught by the police), and some for love of the skirt. The men on one side, to the left, and the women on the other. On the pulpit the preacher painted hell in a lifelike manner, as if he had been there. And at every detail, he thundered with a deep terrifying voice:

"Woe! Woe!"

Like so many cannon shots. The women, herded together inside the enclosure to the right of the nave, bowed their heads in dismay at every shot, and even Don Gennaro Pepi, who was Don Gennaro Pepi! beat his breast in public and muttered out loud:

"Have mercy on me, Lord!"

But you couldn't trust them, because every day, before skinning his fellow men face to face, in private, Don Gennaro Pepi put himself back in the grace of God by going to Mass and to confession, and you knew that all those at the sermon would go and behave the same way they always had.

"Woe to you, rich glutton! You who've fattened yourself with the blood of the poor! — And you, Scribe and Pharisee, spoiler of the widow and the orphan . . . "

This was for Zacco, the notary. And there was something for all the others: for Baron Scàmpolo, who had a lawsuit with the Reverend Capuchin Fathers, for Don Luca Arpone, who lived in concubinage with his factor's wife, for the factor, who got even with his Master by stealing from him, for the liberals, who plotted against the Bourbons in the Mondella Pharmacy; in short, for everybody, rich and poor, maidens and married women. And each one in the village, knowing the faults of his neighbor, said in his own heart: "It's a good thing it's falling on *him*!" at every sin the preacher dealt with, and people turned to look in that direction.

"And when you are in the eternal fire, then what will you do? . . . Woe."

"What's the matter?" muttered Donna Orsola Giuncada in the ear of her daughter, who was squirming around on her seat, as if she were really on the hot coals, to ogle Nini Lanzo way in the back. "What's the matter? Are you getting the itch now? Watch out, or I'll slap it out of you!"

Meanwhile, you felt you were suffocating, cooped up in there. With the heat, the darkness, the heavy odor of the crowd, those two flimsy candles winking pitifully at the Christ on the altar, the whining of the altar boy who roughly stuck the collection basket under your nose, the preacher's deep voice booming through the church and giving you goose pimples, you felt your breath taken away. And then it seemed that all the fleas of your conscience, old and new, came back to bite you—especially when you heard the scourging which that good Christian, Cheli Mosca, famous thief, was giving himself down there in the dark; he had come to set a good example and to show that he was changing his ways, there under the very eyes of the judge and the Chief of Police — wham-wham — with the belt from his pants. And if a chicken was missing in the village, they went looking for him right away, damn it! As for the men, they sat still and took it as well as might be expected. But in the enclosure of the women, the word of God worked miracles, no less: sighs,

grumbling, endless nose blowing; and those who had a clean conscience thanked the Lord in front of everybody—*coram populo*—and so much the worse for some others who didn't dare raise their noses from the prayer book! Donna Christina, the judge's wife, for example, or Caolina, who, with all her finery and smell of musk that poisoned the air, was being kept aside as if she had the plague.

"What good will your hair perfumed with myrrh and incense, and your impudent charm do you, impenitent Magdalene? . . ."

Donna Orsola held her nose, disgusted by the scandal that Caolina brought to church, since for women of that sort men neglect even the sacrament of matrimony and let your daughters grow moldy at home; and then there are the other troubles that come from all this: the girls, who to help themselves, even latch on to a penniless tramp without ways or means, like Nini Lanzo; the men with families, who still go gallivanting when they're fifty years old . . .

"Woe to you, adulterous and lustful! . . ."

"Uhm! Uhm!"

Now that the preacher had thrown himself on the seventh mortal sin, and called a spade a spade, poor Donna Orsola felt herself sitting on thorns for her daughter, who opened her eyes wide and didn't miss a single word of the sermon. She coughed, she blew her nose, and finally she began to preach to her in her own fashion: in church girls must be poised and collected, listening only to what's right for them, without making such silly faces, as if the servant of God were speaking Greek.

Instead, the preacher was speaking like Saint Augustine, and you could have heard a pin drop; even Caolina had lowered her veil on her eyes and seemed to be contrite.

The listeners were so taken by the subject of the sermon that old women of fifty began to blush again like young maids, and those who had warmed up the most looked disdainfully at Donna Santa Brocca, the Doctor's wife, who had come to the sermon with an eight-month stomach that was pitiful, and who felt as if she were dying under those looks, poor woman.

She was really a saintly woman, though, God-fearing,

always with priests and going to confession, completely devoted to her home and her husband, so much so that she had filled up that home with children. And her husband — a liberal, one of those who plotted in the Mondella Pharmacy — every time his wife went to bed with labor pains, raved against God and against sacraments, especially that of matrimony, so that the poor woman wept for nine months whenever she was in that condition again.

This time, however, Donna Santa fixed him worse than ever before. It's true that the devil and the preacher had a hand in it—with that hell of a scene the priest had prepared — meaning well, of course. While he strained his throat shouting "Woe to you, lustful!" "Woe to you, adulteress!" the flames of burning resin and sulphur appeared right in the middle of the church, and you heard the sacristan and his friends scream "Alas! Alas!" What did you see then? Some said it was really the devils, some wept out loud, some threw themselves on their knees. The widow Rametta, whose husband had recently been buried there, fainted from fright, as did two or three others out of sympathy. And poor Donna Santa Brocca, already weak in the mind because of the pregnancy, the fasting and the prayers, shaken by the rebukes of her husband and the invectives of the preacher, suffering from the heat, from shame, from the stench of sulphur, was suddenly seized by qualms of conscience, or God knows what, and began to get hysterical and wild-eyed, pale as a dead woman, groping in the air with her hands, and moaned:

"Lord! . . . I'm a sinner! . . . Have mercy on me! . . . "

And all at once, bang, she did it.

Imagine the commotion: wild shouts, screams, mothers hurrying out and pushing in front of them their girls who were curious to see: in short, pandemonium. In the confusion, the men invaded the reserved enclosure, in spite of the judge, who was brandishing his bamboo cane and shouting as if he were in the middle of the public square. Punches and pinches were felt in the crush. That was when, as a matter of fact, Betta, the possessed, made up with Don Raffaele Molla, after they had had so many arguments and made so many shameful scenes, and Caolina, jumping over chairs

and benches better than a goat, let anyone who liked see her embroidered bloomers. The mess was such that you had to look out for your wallet or watch chain, if you had one, but just in case, the judge gave Cheli Mosca a crack on the shoulder with his cane, to make him behave.

Finally, a few well-meaning men, helped by the judge and other authorities, scolding, yelling, grabbing people by the front of their clothes, and running here and there like dogs around a flock, managed to restore a little order, and to start off the procession that was supposed to go to the Matrice, as usual, to give thanks to the Lord — the rabble ahead, disorderly, pushing and slipping on the precipitous little road, and the rich men behind, two by two, with the scourge on their shoulders and wearing crowns of thorns, so that people came from all around to see the best blue bloods of the town, barons and big shots, pass by like that with their eyes low; and the windows were crowded with beautiful women—a temptation for those who passed in the procession with crowns of thorns on their heads. On the balcony of the courthouse, Donna Christina, the judge's wife, chatted with her lady friends, and did the honors of the house as if she were the mistress there.

“Sure! Donna Santa Brocca! She must really have a filthy conscience! Would you have imagined it? A big fake like her? And she passed herself off as a saint! Her husband had better open his eyes in his own house, instead of saying nasty things about everything and everybody!”

Doctor Brocca was a real radical, one of those backbiters of the Mondella Pharmacy, and he went around making his calls instead of listening to the sermon and following the procession; when he heard of the curse that had fallen on him, and his wife was brought home more dead than alive, he began yelling and raving against the Lenten preacher, against the mission, and against the government that permitted such frauds, saying that they wanted to butcher a pregnant woman with those farces; till the judge called him to the courthouse *ad audiendum verbum*, and gave him a good raking over the coals:

“It's the government that's the boss, and you, dear friend, won't be the one to tell them what to do. Is that clear?” —And the Lenten preacher belonged to that order

of Reverend Liguorian Fathers,¹ who made themselves heard as far as Naples² and who went around preaching and noting down the good and bad citizens in the book for their superiors, just as Saint Peter does in paradise. —“You already know you’re not on the good page, dear Don Erasmo! Perhaps you’re tired of making your calls now, and would like to rest in one of His Majesty’s³ prisons? Mind your own business, instead. Is that clear?”

His own business was that his wife was about to leave him a widower, with five children on his hands, poor Don Erasmo, and in addition, in her delirium she blurted out right in front of him certain things that made him prick up his ears, and how!

“Woe to you, adulteress! Woe to you, lustful! . . . I’m in mortal sin! . . . Lord, forgive me! . . .”

In short, what she had heard at the sermon. But Don Erasmo, who hadn’t been at the sermon, didn’t know what to say; he opened his eyes wide and turned all the colors of the rainbow, muttering anxiously:

“Eh! What’re you saying? Eh?”

Not that his wife had ever given him occasion to suspect her, poor woman, with that face of hers! And it would really have been only a dirty trick for someone to do such a thing to Doctor Brocca, someone who didn’t have the duty, that is, as he did, for love of peace, to satisfy the wishes of his wife, whose head was filled with the devilry of the priests, and who received all five sacraments with fervor . . . He knew what it was like to have a brood of children on his hands! Sure, priests don’t have to pay for all this! And if a woman starts losing her head over something, then . . . He had seen all kinds of things! —

“Eh? What’re you saying? Speak clearly, damn it!”

But the sick woman, all red in the face, didn’t pay any attention, looking God knows where with her wide open eyes.

- (1) A religious order founded in Naples by St. Alfonso De’ Liguori in the 18th century.
- (2) At the time of this story Naples was the capital of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies.
- (3) Ferdinand II of the Bourbons, King of the Two Sicilies. He died in 1859, a year before Garibaldi conquered his kingdom.

And on top of this, Donna Orsola Giuncada, who, with the pretext of taking care of her cousin Donna Santa, was always under his feet, would cut him short:

"Is this the way to act? After a miscarriage? I'm surprised at you! You, a doctor!"

"Let her talk, damn it! My own interest is at stake! . . ."

The lady friends who came to visit the sick woman acted astounded! . . .

"Is it possible? A thing like this? She was so healthy! And she had come to the sermon! A model mother! What could she have had on her conscience?"

"Well! . . . Well! . . . "

Then some of them shook their heads discreetly and some looked at one another, and then they left without asking anything else. A few jokers even shook Don Erasmo's hand in a certain way that seemed to mean: "Too bad! It's happened to *you* . . . "

At least that's what he thought! For when an idea like this gets into his head, an honest man doesn't know what to think any more. And hadn't Vito 'Nzerra come to report the talk which the judge's wife, Donna Christina, that gossip, spread around, dragging him in the mud too, poor man?

The talk had no end: perhaps Donna Santa had gone out not feeling well that day, or perhaps her pregnancy had taken a bad turn, or she had been pushed around in the crowd, or this or that or the other; or she had had an argument with her husband:

"Tell the truth, eh, Don Erasmo! . . . "

"The truth . . . the truth . . . One can't know the truth!"

Don Erasmo, who was ready to explode, finally gave vent to his feelings in front of *Signora* Borella and two or three others whom he could trust:

"They don't want the truth to be told! . . . Priests, police, and all those who're in the puppet show! . . . Who lead fools around by the nose! . . . Just like marionettes! . . . And they want to butcher a pregnant woman with such clowning! . . . "

"But no! No! We were all at the sermon . . . I was there, too . . . Nothing happened to anybody else! . . . "

“Well! . . . Then! . . . ”

Then poor Don Erasmo didn't know what to say, his eyes wild and his mouth bitter. He started entreating his wife again, trying to be sweet to her, with half a smile on his lips, while he prepared herb teas and filled her up with medicine:

“Tell the truth to your darling husband . . . What's this sin? What is it I have to forgive you for?”

Like talking to a wall. Sometimes Donna Santa didn't even pull her teeth apart to swallow the medicine; or if she talked she sang the same old song about punishments, grave sins, tongues of fire that she always had before her eyes.

“Ah! Can't I even know what's been going on in my own house, eh?” Don Erasmo fumed then, turning to Donna Orsola who was always there, under his feet.

He, who knew all the stories about everybody else's houses: Donna Christina's scandalous behavior, the scenes of the widow Rametta, who went to cry over the death of her husband in the arms of this one and that one! — He had had some good laughs about all this with the pharmacist and Don Marco Crippa. He thought he could see Don Marco Crippa now, winking his cross-eye; now that the misfortune had happened to him, he had become the fodder for the conversation.

“You understand, Donna Orsola, that I've got a right to know what's been going on in my own house!”

“What's been going on! What do you see? Don't you see that she's delirious, poor woman? It's the words of the sermon that have stuck in her mind . . . ”

Right! Why precisely those words had stuck in her mind, that's what Don Erasmo wanted to know! In his own house there had never been such filthy goings on! . . . As far as he knew, at least! As far as he knew, Good God!

“Good God! Leave me alone, or I'll have to think that you've gotten together on this, you two! And you, talk, explain yourself, damn it!”

“What do you want? Forgive me! . . . ”

Ah no! First Don Erasmo wanted to know what it was he had to forgive! . . . And whom to thank for the trick played on him, if there was one! . . . For “the domestic

theft!" . . . Yes sir, "the domestic theft!" Because if an honest man isn't even safe in a house like his own, a real fortress, and with a wife like his own . . . And to play a trick like that with such a wife must really have come from deep hatred! . . . But who? Muzio, the only one who hung around his place? . . . And more than sixty years old . . . True, Donna Santa was no spring chicken herself any more, and the sin could be old too . . . And then? Then? Those children with whom he had filled his house in observance of the seventh sacrament? Was there some thief among them too? . . . Gennarino, or Sofia . . . or Nicola? . . . All the saints of the calendar were there in his house! Of all ages and all colors . . . Even with red hair like Zacco, the notary, who lived just across the street and who was perfectly capable of having played such a trick on him out of pure and simple villainy, *gratis et amore Dei!*

The poor man was going crazy with these suspicions, and was being gnawed inside, while he had to help the sick woman, and run around here and there in the disorderly house, forced to do everything himself: make the bread soup for Concettina, wash Èttore's face—perhaps the domestic thieves, poor innocents! . . . No, it couldn't go on this way! Donna Santa would finally have to talk, would have to tell the truth, to ease her conscience—if it was true that she was a saintly woman.

But instead, she didn't confess anything, not even at the point of death, not even to the priest who came to bring her the viaticum. Don Erasmo got him face to face in private afterwards, in order to find out the blessed truth, as he followed him down the stairs, his legs faltering under him . . .

—If it's true that there is the world beyond . . . If it's true you have to get there with a clean conscience . . . Especially about certain things that take sleep and appetite away from an honest man forever . . . Ready to forgive though . . . like a good Christian . . .

Nothing! Not even to the father confessor had his wife told anything. —"A true saint, dear Don Erasmo! You can be proud of her . . . " —Either his wife really didn't have anything to say, or even saints know how to lie about some things.

And if Doctor Brocca couldn't remove it then, he could never remove that thorn from his heart, that bitter doubt, that suspicion that made his blood boil when a man came to look for him or even if a man just walked along the street; and it caught him unawares if he stopped for fifteen minutes in the Pharmacy, and it made his house a hell, and poisoned the very bread he ate, as he sat at the table in the middle of that brood of children, God knows how many of them by treachery, who devoured bread by the basketful, and that wife who, having come back from death to life, wanted also to go back to being the same way she was before, completely devoted to her home and her husband, and always with priests and father confessors.

"What kind of confessions do you make? What do you go and tell the father confessor, you women? . . . If you never tell the truth! . . . "

The poor woman wept, was desperate, gave a thousand assurances and swore a thousand oaths. Sometimes, at the shouting, Cousin Orsola ran over and gave him a piece of her mind:

"But what do you want from her anyway? Do you want her to invent sins? Are you absolutely determined to be a cuckold?"

And he had to swallow this too, and keep quiet!

And when all of them, together with Don Marco Grippa and the pharmacist, laughed about the other unfortunate husbands, he had to lower his head and change the subject.

Translated by Giovanni Cecchetti

Literature and the Italian South:

A Symposium

by

G. B. ANCIOLETTI

CORRADO ALVARO

IGNAZIO SILONE

PIERO BIGONGIARI

[From the time of Giustino Fortunato (1848-1932) to that of the still militant Luigi Sturzo and Gaetano Salvemini, and of innumerable younger writers of today, the problem of the Italian South, the *questione meridionale*, has been prominent among sociologists, economists, politicians, and men of letters. It is the problem (recalling, in some respects, situations which exist also in other countries) of the special qualities of the Southern regions: the degree of their participation in the national progress and in "modern" living; their discrepancies from the industrial North; their cultural peculiarities. After the crude and superficial anti-regional policies of the fascist period, the North-South theme, also in terms of the emergence and discovery of a "New South," has gained unprecedented impetus in Italy.

The cultural aspects of the problem are of special interest to us for a number of reasons. We need only mention, for example, that Italian immigration to the United States was formed in its majority by Southerners. Also very obvious is the fact that many of the major contributions to Italian culture in our century, particularly to philosophy and literature, have been made by Southerners: let us only mention Benedetto Croce and Luigi Pirandello. Some of the writers who are chiefly responsible for the recent revival of interest in Italian literature throughout the world, whether Southerners or not, have a strong Southern awareness (for instance, Carlo Levi).

Last year the *Centro Democratico di Cultura e di Documentazione* in Rome on the initiative of its director, Nicola Signorello, who also edits the important periodical *Prospettive Meridionali*, promoted an inquiry on the problems of Southern writing, and particularly on Southern fiction as a mirror of the Southern scene and as the most valid expression of the South's outlook on the world. A wide symposium was the result, to which more than

twenty writers, not all of them Southerners, contributed extensively. In many cases the interest of their statements goes beyond the specific locale of their problems; in terms of a regional situation they exemplify more generally the situation of the literary artist in the world of today.

We have secured for publication in English the four contributions that seemed to us most interesting. The first is by G. B. Angioletti, who sees the flourishing of Southern writing from the point of view of a Northerner with wide foreign experience. The second is by a major Southern writer, Corrado Alvaro, whose native Calabria provided the background to some of his best known works (e.g., his masterpiece, the novelette *Gente in Aspromonte*); his present statement, important in itself for an understanding of the Southern writer's position, has the added poignancy of being one of the very last things he wrote before his recent death. The following contribution by Ignazio Silone justifies the reader's interest not only on account of the world-wide reputation enjoyed by Silone's novels; it turns out to be an essential document for any study of this famous writer and for an understanding of his literary and ideological development. Finally Piero Bigongiari, the Florentine critic, puts the problem of Southern writing in more technically literary terms; his handling of the linguistic aspects of the question bears reference to themes with which Giacomo Devoto dealt, in a more general manner, in an article published in our Spring issue.]



Responsibility of Southern Writers

by

G. B. ANGIOLETTI

I have had numerous opportunities of discussing contemporary Italian literature with foreign writers and scholars, and I have noticed repeatedly that their interest is converging more and more on fiction of southern authors and of southern content. And every time I asked the reason for such preference, I was told that in the Italian South one finds greater "authenticity" than anywhere else in the peninsula, and that the very artistic reflection of such nature constitutes the most gratifying thing a reader can find in Europe today. It is natural that that which is different should stand out all the more in a world which is becoming more

and more uniform as it patterns itself on superficial and mediocre formulae, and in which every spontaneous feeling is constrained to observe a certain number of conventions. This is confirmed by the fact that even before the Italians themselves, a few foreign writers set out upon the "discovery" of our South: among these, D. H. Lawrence who went to Sardinia, and Valéry Larbaud who took off for Lucania (in this connection I wish to recall that twenty-five years ago Leonardo Sinisgalli, then a very young poet, was stirred to write several incisive pages on his native town Montemurro by the stimulating example of the exquisite French author).

For this reason, the recent literary blossoming of the South should be received with great favor. The writers of Calabria, Sicily, Apulia, and of the other regions south of Rome, are entrusted with the task of presenting their towns and their inhabitants not only to their fellow countrymen but also to the rest of the world, highlighting their most intimate and secret traits. This is an honor and a responsibility at the same time. The South which foreigners wish to know is in fact somewhat different from the South depicted by some of those writers in their novels, where the individual tends to fade away into the collective, and the particular becomes lost not in the universal, as one would hope, but in a general theorism or in a conceptual abstraction. In other words, whether it be for Naples, Catania, Sassari, or even more for the small towns, what is usually stressed are those problems which are common to all the other cities and villages of poor nations: that is, essentially economic and social problems. It goes without saying that all this is justified; in fact it must be done, for it can contribute to the betterment of the life of the lower classes. But herein lies also a great danger for the artist, for his theme may carry him so far from the human truth of the characters, that he will make them act exclusively in accordance with pre-conceived ideas, thus depriving them of consistency, and making them artificial and, finally, unacceptable to the readers who are not directly concerned with our national vicissitudes. The stereotyped town, made up of filthy and unwholesome dwellings, and the conventional character, drawn in turn as a little tyrant or as a slave, strip the narrative of the very authenticity and diversity which today attract everybody's attention

to our South. The example of Verga (who by now is also known and admired by the cultured foreigner) should be followed with greater perspicacity; not by recasting and contracting into a sketch his narrative inventions, but by learning the important lesson in objectivity (more than in objectivism) which he has bequeathed to us. The small world of the Southern villages should not lose its precise and clear-cut contours and become lost in a colorless scheme typical of all corners of the globe. By avoiding the mannerism which is threatening it, therefore, the literature of the South will also have to avoid the indefinite, elusive but even more insidious "problemism," and remain faithful to certain irreplaceable characteristics of the environment. A felicitous artistic representation—in which the human outweighs every *parti-pris* — will do more good to the cause of the Italian South than ten or a hundred volumes of propaganda or polemics cloaked in fiction or poetry. We all have known France through her less "engaged" writers; we have admired England through the most lyrically subjective of her poets; we have understood something of Russia in the least sermonizing of Tolstoy's and Dostoevsky's works; and we have discarded some of our prejudices against America after reading Faulkner, Hemingway, and other writers wholly devoid of panegyrics. Literature has always been the best intermediary for mutual understanding among peoples, provided it is "artistic," disinterested, or even autobiographical, but never laudatory or denunciatory (all the more since truly efficacious denunciation springs forth from the living, throbbing representation of facts, which is devoid of the slightest commentary).

I wish to stress again that the young writers of the South have before them a great task and a great responsibility. There are many of them by now, and they are gifted, culturally well prepared, and among all Italian writers, they are perhaps the ones with the strongest convictions. If they succeed in avoiding the dangers I have mentioned above, and if they write about their homes and their fellow-townsmen with a free and open mind (many are already doing this, even if somewhat cowed by external demands), they will do for the South something comparable to what political and practical men are doing with their building programs

and land reclamation. For they will acquaint the world with the Italian of the South, who has been so often maligned, so rarely understood: he who is even today a worthy continuer — indeed as very few others are — of a culture in which passion is the ally of wisdom, and the labor of life is tempered and appeased by spiritual hope.

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Fitting into the Present

by

CORRADO ALVARO

I must say that I have never aspired to the reputation of being a Southern writer, and I hope that this is proven by the work I have produced up to now. In other words I have never, save in the proper place, in a few articles and essays, set out to cast light on the conditions of my region, Calabria, or to illustrate its more or less current problems. I have never intended to engage myself socially, but rather to depict reality and to find a poetic, that is literary, dimension. If this is a defect it is one that derives from my humanistic background. The concept of utilitarian literature is rather recent and was quickly acquired by mechanical arts like the films. I think that literature takes on active color from indirect causes depending on the strength of the feelings which animate a writer. It is not that I disdain literature with a mission but only that I think literature has a mission by its very nature. Therefore when I read apropos of my writing on the subject of Calabria, either that my views are not of a vital and present-day Calabria or that Calabria is for me an abstraction like the bottles which Morandi paints, I can agree. These are considerations without artistic importance even though the fact remains that it was I, for reasons purely of age, who gave certain indications of the soul of that region, within the orbit of a certain taste and of the development of European literature in the last thirty years. When certain points of a poetic world are defined it is easier to explore.

I have the humanistic disposition of the Calabrian men-

talities. This is for us the thing most difficult to overcome, and it is easy to be dominated by academic prejudices, to consider literature as already accomplished, with its invariable models and with its exploits catalogued, and to feel that it only remains for us to add marginal notes: in other words, to be perpetual imitators. This is demonstrated not only in the meagre history of Calabrian literature, and I am not speaking of Telesio or Campanella, but in almost all Southern literature, with its great exceptions, until the Risorgimento and national unity brought the South and its genius into the cultural tradition, and it was realized that it was possible to write with the structure of the dialect in mind, a structure archaic but with the same root as Tuscan, and that it was unnecessary to revert to formulas imitated from the sixteenth century or borrowed from Arcadia, the last remnant of domestic Southern literature. There emerged Settembrini, De Sanctis, Verga, d'Annunzio, Croce, Pirandello and Di Giacomo, pupil of a Calabrian, the abbé Padula, who would have been an Arcadian had not the Risorgimento borne him into the midst of the new Italy, Di Giacomo who was the first to discover the sadness of Neapolitan life and whose disciples are by no means extinct.

If I had to look for the real Southern masters, I would choose them from the Southern humanistic tendency which produced such conspicuous fruits, that tendency to which belonged the provincial doctors and lawyers of the generation before mine, who "cultivated" literature: the Greeks, the Latins, the Tuscans of the great centuries. The road lay between them and a modern content, the task was to open eyes to the world of today and to understand it despite the habit of thinking about and longing for the past. There should be no need for examples. The seven whose names I have mentioned, and the emergence of Southern culture and literature, derive from that humanistic tendency troubled by a curiosity about things in the modern world. If much national literature, from illustrious regions, was born in clandestine writings, it relates to a loftier tradition. But it would seem that every literature worthy to be so called in Europe and which has continuity, is bound to that tradition, and that their passions derive from the classics. But we Italians vacillate constantly between the imitation with which we pick up the

crumbs of the past and the rupture with every traditional form, sensitive to what is being done in the countries which are in the forefront of culture. And so we have not seldom a second-hand literature and are academic even in this, in the imitation of the new forms discovered in the more vital modern literatures, and forgetful that the discoveries of new methods serve only their inventors and remain unrepeatable, unless they fall in the hands of unscrupulous writers. We fall into the trap of the formal excitation provoked by the reading of a writer of originality, and the case seems rare of a Verga who read Zola in his own way, took from him what we all know, and waited in vain for a word of recognition from the master of naturalism.

To consider literature according to the measure of seasonal fashion remains nonetheless the characteristic of this period without memory. We have seen how difficult, if not annoying, was the emergence of some original contributions. This happened to Verga, Pirandello and Svevo, who were looked on with contempt by their contemporaries. They passed from obscurity and indifference into history without establishing a period. These frequent episodes in a literature without destination tell something about our completely occasional literature climate and explain the lack of hierarchy in our literary situation.

I should continue on this line if I did not have to return to my personal history as a writer. It is very simple, contained in my effort to make a place in a living world, the world of contemporary culture. Some thirty years ago we were working at something which has borne its fruit: at the formation of a written language which would be a modern vehicle, like every other linguistic vehicle in modern Europe, for the expression of the modern world and its aspirations. If today the Italian writer moves in a simple, expressive language, which is the Italian literary language, a language spoken nowhere but become the language of the newspapers, that fact is due to the work of more than thirty years, of more than one generation, beginning after the final prose of d'Annunzio, the prodigal son who, after wasting so much vocabulary, made the first approach to the new form of our literature. I think work such as this might be given more consideration by young Southern writers, even if without masters.

Fiction and the Southern "Subsoil"

by

IGNAZIO SILONE

In this exchange of opinions concerning southern fiction it would seem proper to discard the evident and the obvious, and to proceed a little farther. In comparison with other methods, more or less "external," of classifying writers (by generation, sex, political party, etc.) this historico-geographical-social criterion of so-called "southernness" is not, it seems to me, the most useless and sterile. Provided, of course, that we do not abuse it, and provided that we do not forget that the common characteristics of such "southernness" are to be found in the individual works in greatly varying degree, and in general only as an accessory and marginal coefficient. Therefore, even this investigation of "southernness" will be of limited interest, but useful to the explanation of the individual personalities of the writers. In fact, the southern writers who have so far participated in this exchange of opinions, in order to say something concrete have spoken of themselves, of their background and development in the provincial milieu. Before doing the same thing, I should like to be allowed certain brief observations of a general nature.

1. Perhaps some of the more recent expressions of southern fiction have been inspired or stimulated by the abundant economic and sociological literature which during the last sixty years, and through the efforts of people of unquestionable excellence, has been devoted to the study of our "southern question." But it would be a mistake, in my opinion, to imagine a derivation, or even simply a direct rapprochement between fiction and propaganda. Verga most certainly does not derive from the Honorable De Felice. I consider that vision of "southernness," and particularly the ideology that

inspired it, superseded by now, along with the other unsolved problems of the "Third Italy." I mean that our problems of today are no longer the internal ones of the Italian national state. Hence their solution cannot be outlined by those "southern experts," because the national state, here as elsewhere, is in an advanced state of exhaustion, and if it is to avoid rotting away completely it must integrate itself in a system of wider relationships. Indeed the question now is one of the needs of our South together with those of backward regions outside our national boundaries. A writer may also, and with good cause, remain indifferent to these political themes and ignore them. But the original causes for the failure, in practical application, of the plans for the moral and civic "nationalization" of our southern provinces, from the post-Risorgimento era to the immediate post-Fascist period, may be of extreme interest to him also. For they may help to better understand some of the more profound and essential aspects of our people's character and what the latter may hide under the appearances of weariness and skepticism. If southern fiction (and I am now referring to that which has clearly expressed realistic aims) remains to a large extent descriptive and journalistic, I believe that this happens because of the lack of such awareness. My thesis is this: in the last hundred years the southerners have not moved because no one has made use of their true aspirations or their authentic energies and these, meanwhile, have remained hidden and unknown or feared. Therefore, I think that the criticism of Bakunin and Mazzini is valid also for the successive leaders of the unitary state among the southerners. In other words, the ignorance and poverty of the southern population do not alone explain the lack of success of those worthy gentlemen, both liberal and democratic, undoubtedly deserving of better results but on the wrong path. The Africans and the Asians who are now fighting tenaciously for their independence, are certainly not better educated or better fed than our peasants; but they are fighting for objectives and with symbols which better express their most profound aspirations. At any rate, as of now, there is no road sign on the path of progress which forces the peasants of the South to pass through the phase "national middle class" before going ahead. It is ridiculous to demand that

history, like nature, not permit any jumps. The positivists affirmed it, but by now everyone believes the opposite; and what has happened in other countries, technically more backward, is a proof of it.

2. That our southern fiction is not derived necessarily from the historical "question" of typically Italian origin and content, is furthermore confirmed by the fact that we find a "southern" prose, with some characteristics similar to ours, in other places as well. In this connection it is curious to note that many are the countries in which the South is not only a geographical concept, but an historical and social one as well, in opposition to the North. Almost everywhere the South is poorer than the North. Almost everywhere it is prevailingly agricultural, while the North is industrialized. It would be extravagant to insist on this and other natural and historical analogies in an attempt to extract any theory whatsoever. However, nothing prevents us from conveniently appreciating the fact that a Sicilian or Abbruzzese tale could be accepted in Virginia, in Ukrainia, or in Indonesia as the story of a local event. It is also significant that around 1935 the authorities in Poland and Croatia carried out special investigations to ascertain whether *Fontamara* was actually a book translated from the Italian, and not the work of one of their citizens, set in Italy to deceive the censors.

3. What do these coincidences mean? The greatest, the most evident reality of our era. The suffering of the proletariat and of the poor peasants knows no political boundaries. Its meaning transcends economic limitations. It is today's present image of the suffering Christ; the penance and redemption of an absurd society. It is the most alive and universal value of our times, and no social renovation can be conceived unless it be based on it. What is the position in our country of a writer who attains this intuition of human existence today? Where can he find, for his work, help, support, or ideal guidance? I am aware that for writers there is available the humanistic tradition which is handed down to us through the study of the classics. Now, what I think of this enlightened tradition is quickly said. It seems to me, in truth, that it is in pretty sorry condition. I believe there is no doubt about the inadequacy of Graeco-Roman culture to provide us with a synthesis of the con-

trasting ideals of our time. If the quotations from Cicero have been missing for a long time from the speeches of politicians and of experts on modern problems, this cannot be attributed solely to ignorance. The humanistic tradition served excellently as long as the Mediterranean was the center of the universe. Meanwhile, as we all know, the world has become larger and has finally split into two or three segments. I don't believe that Professor Francesco Flora has ever gone among the Chinese to defend the cult of Apollo; I don't believe him to be devoid of a sense of humor to that extent. A cultural tradition which in today's world is unable to settle the struggle among classes or among people of different color, is renouncing its very universality and becomes a dead language. But let us return home and speak of the situation among our own writers. No one believes any longer in the effectiveness (formative) of classical studies. The private and civic morals of the cultivators of the *humanae litterae*, do not warrant it. There would still remain the importance of that discipline as a moulder of taste and form. However, modern aesthetics, taking a leaf from the Gospel, advises against the pouring of new wine into old bottles. We are, therefore, alone in the moment of danger just like helpless Christians in the arena.

4. It is said, however, that books are like trees; they do not grow from nothing. That is true. However, one could reply that they nevertheless do not necessarily bloom from other books. Nothing, in fact, is falser than a merely bookish concept of the spiritual tradition of a country. Tradition is not exclusively literary, and no literature has ever developed like a homogeneous chain of which the individual writers and poets are the links. To the extent to which a writer can contribute to his own criticism, I have no difficulty in saying that in my development as a writer, even in my technique, far more than schooling and reading, the experiences of life have had a decisive influence. And among them I must mention, first of all, my association with peasants and workers in circumstances requiring definite taking of sides. I am absolutely convinced that if I had had a different life, even though I had attended the same schools and read the same books, I should not have written what I have written and in the manner in which I have written it.

I have already stated elsewhere that the rediscovery of our Christian heritage in the midst of the social crisis of our time remains the most important acquisition of our conscience in the last few years. This refers, obviously, to both the citizen and the writer.

I don't know if I shall shock someone now by explaining that of this fundamental religious and popular reality of our country, I had not received the slightest inkling either from school or from books, and that I came face to face with it for the first time in my association with "red" peasants. The "Trumpet of Lazarus," for example, is not to be considered an original invention of mine. Even if we do not take into account that that image was suggested to me by a news item of unmistakable meaning, still it constitutes an attempt to represent in literary terms that spiritual heritage to which I have alluded: namely, an attempt to represent the popular Christian myth of the expectation of the Kingdom. And this myth is found, it seems to me, as the core of the most profound and deeply rooted aspirations of the southern peasants. Through historical observation it is seen as the fountainhead of their restlessness, of their revolts, of their heresies, in all the critical periods, from Giocchino da Fiore, Francis of Assisi, Pietro da Morrone, to Cafiero, to the peasants' "fasci," to the "pentacostali," to the anarchists of today. It is one of those truths that Chesterton has picturesquely called "mad truths," the secret truths; a truth, in other words, of undoubted Gospel origin which, if it feels itself neglected or forgotten among the believers, cannot find peace and takes refuge elsewhere.

But now I ask myself: how can such a categorical assertion, in which is implied also an evaluation of social movements in progress, be explained without arousing the suspicion that it is a political or ideological infatuation? And how can we make it realistic and worthy of attention to those who have not known through personal experience, or have known in unfavorable circumstances, the incredible reserve of energy which in contrast with their daily psychology, often mingled with naturalistic superstitions, suspicions, skepticism, pettiness, and servility, lies hidden at the bottom of the soul of the poor peasants of the South? I am not referring, it should be clear, to the sudden impulses of which, through

the suggestion of able demagogues, these peasants are both prey and victims. I have in mind a precise faculty and dimension of the soul: something permanent and fundamental in its intimate structure as it has historically developed over a thousand years, and which usually remains hidden and neglected, to reveal itself suddenly in critical situations, completely reversing habitual psychology and refuting the system of established values. There is no doubt that it is the most ancient, genuine and direct element of the southern Christian subsoil. It was this that in the South inspired the great Franciscan movement and its numerous sects (the only peasant revolution that Italy has had); and it is this that still feeds the hope of liberty and the closely related messianic faith. The South of Italy, from this point of view, finds an echo in some regions of Spain and of Russia. It is foolish to attribute this spiritual peculiarity to a natural hallucinatory power of poverty, since so many other sections, even poorer, do not know it.

I came to have personal experience of it through fortuitous circumstances, the same that led me at the age of seventeen, during the first World War, to head certain "red" leagues of peasants from Abruzzi, and ten years later into the clandestine Communist movement. It was an acquaintance, perhaps precocious, with many difficulties and sorrows of life, but also with its most unforeseeable resources. And if the encounter had such lasting consequences, it must have been because it was among those peasants that I found myself. In relation to the image of the world I derived from school and from the reading of books, it was the other side of the medal; the house seen from the outside. Hence the event was a source of knowledge and emotion. Life acquired through it a new perspective, not commonplace. The workers and the poor peasants with whom I found myself involved were by no means extraordinary individuals. The circumstances and the machinery in which we were caught, however, were exceptional. Many of them, put to the test, behaved honestly, were willing to face danger. Why? Among the workers and in general among the laborers of the North, the effectiveness of socialist political education, which had become a requirement and a habit of freedom, seemed evident to me, while the force of resistance of the southern peas-

ants, appeared to me substantially different. Outside of the Risorgimento tradition, disgusted by the *trasformismo* of the politicians from the provinces, skeptical toward all political forms, even democratic ones, their revolutionary coherence lacked any utilitarian illusion and its basis was essentially religious even when they declared themselves atheists. It was an extreme faithfulness to the intuition of a world drastically different from the historical one: an image which man carries sealed in his heart and which will not fail so long as someone will remain faithful to it. In these men, these men of our time, "classified" and checked at sight, it is not difficult to recognize the same types who in the Middle Ages, through the same faith, went into the monasteries.

5. What is the sense, then, of speaking of tradition and realism in general as if they were exclusive terms? In an ancient and chaotic region like our South, any living man has his own ancestors and struggles within his own reality. It seems to me that I have shown that in our region the most illustrious of traditions is indeed that of the anarchists, who are by definition anti-traditionalists. Furthermore, the true writer never chooses his reality himself, being rather chosen by it, and a more appropriate criterion of judgment would therefore be an evaluation of his coherence. It remains to be seen how the writer performs in front of the blank sheets of paper. In this, however, I am afraid that I cannot be of any help to those critics who seek the origin of books in preceding books. There are books for which the search for antecedents leads to the personality of the author. In such cases, how the writer developed, whether he is a truly living man, he himself does not know entirely and can speak only in conjectures. Thus it is inevitable that in the conception of my writings should be found traces of a certain Christian upbringing and of a certain socialist criticism of the modern world, because they are an essential part of my mental outlook. But a more exact examination of the same writings can establish that the religious and social experience have left a notable imprint even in the manner of expression and of inventing. To tell the truth, the premises of an artistic reconciliation between Christian inspiration and Socialism, in fiction of realistic type, has always appeared to me as are both dramatic, dualistic visions of life. For both, the

intellectually plausible, because Christianity and Socialism reality of the external world is unquestionable and idealistic solipsism is banned. Consider *Fontamara*: the internal tension rests on the clear detachment between the conscience of its peasant characters and the "objective" development of events. Catastrophe arrives unexpectedly. But for the rest, I have no difficulty in admitting the limitations of my pre-meditation. "Have you noticed" asked (by letter) the Swiss writer Aline Valangin, "that the principal situations of *Bread and Wine* and *Seed under the Snow* reproduce invariably liturgical situations? The Manger in the stable (The Infant), the Flight, the Supper, the betrayal, the sacrifice . . ." The remark surprised me and in part convinced me, making me aware of many other things. Liturgy? Here is an antecedent of which a literary critic would not think.

6. I read Verga in exile only after writing *Fontamara*: and I went to the theater for the first time at the age of seventeen, on a visit to Rome. But my native town, which before the earthquake had about seven thousand inhabitants, mostly peasant, was a Bishopric, had a curia, a seminary, seven churches with one cathedral (a disproportion to be found only in the South). In such an environment the liturgical services that took place in the cathedral, the bishop's services, the vespers, the solemn rites, acquired a unique poetic fascination unimaginable elsewhere, by offering the only expression of true art locally available, choreography, music, Gregorian chant, eloquence, in terms of sacred rites in which the faithful participated with the priests. Even now the work of art which most deeply touches me is the Saint Matthew's Passion of Bach.

7. But the singularity of fate, with all the limitations that derive from it, induces whoever is aware of it, to a liberal respect for others. Human reality is so complex and manifold that it justifies the most different representations, from those of the photographers to those of the surrealists and abstractionists. And what one can say in explanation of himself does not imply a request for the ostracism of others. Respect, however, does not exclude judgment. This is then what I think of a certain southern *verismo* or realism. Reality without problems seems to me sterile, sad, inhuman, history which becomes still-life. I cannot imagine a life which does

not harbor a radical antithesis. This is, I dare say, the difference between Fontamara and Aci Trezza. The old southern reality, wearisome, opaque, humiliating, with that unrelenting suffering, with that blind obsession for "property," which knew only the vain revolt of the senses, the will-o'-the-wisps of eroticism and vice, is now cracked, its very foundations threatened from the inside by the mutiny of the humbled and oppressed. The severe and sad stoicism of the resignation of primitive beings who wasted away day by day under the tenacious persecution of fate, has been shaken internally by a restlessness which was inherent in it and which has distant roots, for a long time unknown. It is unfortunately true that as soon as we draw away from rigorous *verismo* the possibilities for mystification multiply (definitely mystifying to me seems the attribution to our southern population of the fetishistic magic of the savages of Papuasias, learned from the books of Lévy-Bruhl, even if transposed with undeniable effects of *trompe-l'oeil*); but it is a risk inherent in all that deals with the conscience of man.

8. Today's basic problems of southern fiction are, on the artistic plane, the same as those of the personal and social life of the South. Considering objectively the results already achieved, it seems to me that it would be at least premature to exchange congratulations and compliments. Let our pride be greater. The only books that a traveller found in the house of an artisan in Calabria were two volumes of Tolstoy; and he was surprised. Still, it is not a new occurrence and it deserves to be reconsidered to our confusion. It means that our fiction is still late in relation to that particular class of readers whose winning over should constitute the highest ambition of a writer.

The South is now on the move through circumstances and causes that the historians of the South had not foreseen, and it is probable that it will not come to a stop soon. However, it is a situation which requires a new evaluation and of which stock should be taken periodically for a certain number of years. A new ruling class is forming, composed of small and medium land owners and of professionals and technicians from the same group. The problem of the political renovation of the South as outlined by Guido Dorso is about to reappear on different bases. He spoke in favor

of a break between the intellectual class and the land-owning middle class; of an alliance of the first with the peasant masses. Very soon the old-fashioned humanistic middle class and the land-owning middle class will find themselves pushed to the margins of southern life, and the problem of the relation between the new ruling class *in fieri* with the most destitute groups of the peasants is already arising. But carrying forward our South is a different problem from colonizing a country recently arisen where engineers and social workers are sufficient. In our South no progress can take hold and last if it is directed from above, without the knowledge and in the absence of those directly concerned, without putting in motion their hidden energy and without their enthusiasm. No progress is conceivable there, unless it be internal, self-redeeming progress. It is not a question of gift-packages for Christmas. And perhaps it would be useful if southern writers would take pains to explain this to the engineers and the agricultural experts, unless they want to be mistaken for tourists in their own country. "Let us meet time halfway when it calls us."

However, the function of the writer is not exhausted in his civic duty. Writers cannot become bureaucratic or semi-bureaucratic functionaries. They belong to man and society and not to institutions. There is a universally human restlessness, which in the South seems perfectly at home (exactly what the artisan experiences in reading Tolstoy), that certainly will not disappear even with the desirable and desired extinction of poverty, something, alas, still far away. The utopian essence of a certain type of man of the South may perhaps seem a useless waste of energy to the federation secretaries and to the tax assessors, but it is certainly of enormous importance (perhaps the only important thing) in the eyes of God. It represents a wealth more important than the oil discovered at Ragusa and Vallecupa. Now, since priests are already too busy with elections, cooperatives, associations, etc., it does not seem wrong to me to encourage some young writers to take an interest in it.

Roots, Language and Style of Fiction

by

PIERO BIGONGIARI

I would like to begin with an anecdote. Some years ago, Pratolini was working on a novel about post-war Naples; it centered about a story more or less true of a factory destroyed during the war, which the workers, under the guidance of one of their number more daring and resourceful than the rest, manage to rebuild. All went well until one fine day, after everything had been set to rights, the owner returns from the North, takes over control and closes the factory, laying off the workers who had managed, with the help of the black market (from the destroyed refinery their women sold the oil which the men slowly recovered by pressing, as if it were pulp, the oil-soaked rubble), to extricate from the worthless twisted girders something alive and pulsating which would create, if not actual wealth, at least life and reasons for living. I recall that the writer himself, with such burning questions in hand and quite far advanced in his work, confessed to me one day that the novel had not found and was not finding a language of its own, *its* language. Here was a Florentine looking at Naples and, if you will, the Southern Question, and trying to see it objectively, not in a context of anecdote; a Florentine dissatisfied with the way Neapolitan writers were looking at post-war Naples. But he was brought to a halt by an unresolved problem of language: in actual fact, then, he felt compelled to reject the idea that it was enough to rinse out in the Bay of Naples dirty linen from the Oltrarno and then hang it up to dry in one of the alleys of Spaccanapoli. The language should take its origin from the things themselves; otherwise the things themselves have not come alive. Pratolini realized that and turned, for the time being, to *Una storia italiana* in which he sought in temporal dimensions that

which spatial dimensions, in a different space (Naples and not his own city) presented to him as objective, but also as objectively insoluble. It was a problem of language that put him on guard, one may say, but when language gives such signs, the problem, for a real writer, is the problem of setting, of things. Regarding the difficulties a writer's imagination must overcome in putting down roots, consider one such difficulty, itself become an object of literature, consider all the changes of train of Vittorini's Uncle Agrippa in *Le donne di Messina*, and the peregrinations from one Sicilian village to another of the protagonist of Vittorini's last and still unpublished novel, almost as if, in mixing North and South, and a particular South with another particular South, things and places were merged in a kind of revitalizing nomadism: considering time even as a contemporaneity of those same things, one with another. The problem then hinges on a question which is a Southern Question only because it has been formulated in the South, but which in reality is the question of man situated in a particular time and in a particular place. If Pratolini's Neapolitans were acquiring speech inflexions from the Oltrarno, or if, to escape this danger, they were speaking — and if the things themselves were speaking — not in dialect but in a standard language, the result would be a timeless pastiche and not an historical (always remembering its contemporaneity) novel. Even Boccaccio, Gothic narrator of international adventures and wonders, in his story of Andreuccio da Perugia, tries to harmonize with the evil-smelling alleys of a certain Naples the cadence of his prose: its complexity in the narrative is the complexity, somewhat mysterious, of a notorious neighborhood; in short, Boccaccio, uprooted in effect by stylistic imitation, puts down roots in one place with all its particularities.

It is in this sense that I would like to propose an interpretation of Verga's realism as an object-language with no possible gap between event and stylistic fact, which should again demonstrate that every work is a work of preparation, of a general nature, and that everything then plunges into a multiplicity which is the very variety of things and movements. After that, the intervention of the narrator in the narrative fact is insignificant, but precisely because the work

had all happened before, at the critical stage of intention; that is, when reality itself is caught in crisis, during the act of its very organization; when the spirit acquires a sense of its own objectivity at one with the objects with which it accords, by their means, in condescending to this "real," taking on the very sense of creation. In short, for Verga creating means achieving the spirit of the creation with a minimum of intervention owing to a maximum of preparation, or, in other words, of preliminary research. And that is the reason Verga's realism is a gradation of reality which does not fasten it to a pure determinism, because of the very way it penetrates human awareness. I mean to say that Verga's realism preserves that measure of surprise which makes the act of appearance suffice because a profound need for it has been expressed. Look, for example, how in *Jeli il pastore* Verga composes through disposition of events, through, as it were, a visual subordination of them one to another, without stringing them together or subordinating them, so that it would appear almost that, by juxtaposition, the eye were gazing into the heart of things about to be born ("heart" both spatially and temporally):

"That is the way things are in this world: while Jeli was going about looking for a master, with his sack slung over his back and his stick in hand, the band in the square was gaily playing, with plumes in their caps, in the midst of a crowd of white hats thick as flies, and the worthies were there to make the most of it, sitting in the café. Everyone was dressed in holiday clothes, like animals at a fair, and at one corner of the square there was a woman in a short skirt and flesh-colored stockings that made her legs look naked, and she was beating on a bass drum in front of a large painted sheet that depicted a Slaughter of Christians, with blood that streamed in torrents, and in the crowd that stood gaping, there was also Foreman Cola who had known him since he was at Passanitello, and told him that he would find him a master, since *compare* Isidoro Macca was looking for a herdsman for his pigs. 'But don't say anything about Starbrow,' Cola advised him. 'A misfortune like that could happen to anybody on earth. But it's better not to say anything.'"

The active intervention of the writer is reduced to a

minimum, it is contained within that introduction, more preparatory and gnomic (by way of presenting the spectacle of the world) than actually reflective: "That is the way things are in this world;" a veritable "That's life." From there he begins a passage containing two sentences that have a mutually complementary rhythm. Look at the way the first begins: "While Jeli was going about looking . . . ;" observe now the way the second ends: "since *compare* Isidoro Macca was looking for a herdsman for his pigs." In between, things are approached and described in a way that seems at variance with their very weightiness, which is kept intact, but which in reality brings the eye, in a long circuit, to approach naturally the things and facts which in "life" exist without being either problematic or in themselves subject to a particular fictional necessity, that is, thematic. Thus, the rapprochement between one sentence and the other takes shape in purely visual, static terms: "and the worthies . . . " When this collective rhythm of things has been achieved, we learn that "in the crowd that stood gaping, there was also Foreman Cola . . . " And the paragraph ends with an immediate and direct insertion of Foreman Cola into the story, as he gives his advice to Jeli.

While the linguistic and moral lesson of Verga reached the North, and for example with Pavese, who had continually to overcome his exalted dilettantism and for whom the work of art was accordingly a veritable life insurance to be redeemed even by extreme means (he had the satisfaction of the good soldier who for extreme ills finds extreme cures), the question of the South — filtered through the lens of American realism — has become the question of the North (and the lesson continues unchanged "through channels," coming into view in the stylistic irritability of Fenoglio, narration in a language bound in with fine effects by a version of the colloquial speech of Alba), the South finds itself having to undertake, and not only on the literary level, a new labor of excavation, a labor in depth, in order to prepare the loom on which an imagination could weave itself without patchwork. For this reason, we could not say of many writers born in the South that they belong to an authentic reawakening of southern fiction. In this sense, to continue the example, a Fenoglio is more of a southern writer than

many natives of the South. We find ourselves almost obligated to say that southern Verghism is more than anything else a reflection of the critical afflatus of the North, driven even to those regions of the Atlantic anticyclone. How many post-war John Horne Burnses, not to mention the Hemingways concerned with Capracotta and Africa, and the Faulkners and Caldwelles, and even the peasant Christ set down among the workers in an industrialized civilization at the end of Pietro di Donato's novel, have made fashionable again the Galleria Umberto I in Naples and its windows still dirty from the smoke of explosions and shooting? In the same way D. H. Lawrence, too, with his primitivistic pan-sexualism, must be said to have helped make Verga a European author, whom our Italian writers have read in the wake of that new impetus. In short, the question of the South, following its authentic vein, had been presented on the post-war literary scene directly through the strongly lyrical conversion (a phenomenon, for that matter, common to all pre-war Italian prose) of the Alvaros and Vittorinis. People lived in Aspromonte as in a myth. Lyrical realism in direct contact with "artistic prose" did not, in the last analysis, succeed in "documenting." And in this sense, after those reasons for a direct focus had lapsed in many of the later southern writers, we must say also that instead of seeing the South rather typified than characterized, we still prefer to read thorough documentation of a reality without subtleties, such as that put forth by the investigating Commission of poverty in the region of Grassano, rather than evasive exploitations of a situation that still has many factual surprises in store. At this point, without seeming to condescend, we would like actually to invite to realism the novelist or poet who may be able to participate in a living substance such as it is represented not so much in the "Question" as in the authentic and still shadowy essence of the whole Italian South. In short, if one is animated by personal ends, it is useless to desire to see like Zola and to feel like Flaubert: the result would be a spirit importuned from southern shanties but warmed by Roman radiators; and to us it seems neither right nor respectful, either to those shanties or to these radiators. Even Verga divided his spirit, but in horizontal fashion, not according to the dubious vertical-

ism of our neo-realist *pasticheurs*: he divided it from *Tigre reale* to *I Malavoglia*: and there was still a trace of the Southern Question working in him, unresolved in its contrasts, psychological as well as economic and esthetic, but just at that moment when his glance would wander from the country of his heroes. Otherwise, to call Verga provincial, for the very reason that his most penetrating glance is fixed on a province, and becomes manifest in the manners of that province, is then excessive or excessively little: Verga is Sicilian to the exact degree that Manzoni is Lombard, but when that is said, all the rest remains. Or if not, Verga is less than provincial, less even than local: he merely reads a small thing which is, beneath the rags, the human heart. But it would be like saying that it is also excessive to declare Morandi provincial, because his glance is fixed on a dusty table, and among planetary travelers, his journey is at most a "voyage autour de sa chambre."

And yet a southern fiction (putting the field in historical perspective, after having rescued it from the limbo of myths, among which the most dangerous is that of an "anti-literature") exists, and it is this period since the war that has declared to us its extent. In this regard, I would like to note at what pains the most *endiablé* of these writers, Domenico Rea, has been to show us that his papers are in order and that he has read all the proper things. Down to the youngster Saverio Strati: a name to be added to the bibliography of southern writers even if his first fruits, somewhere between first-person narrative and fable, are not collected in a book. In short, in an impatient atmosphere, even the South, perhaps actually at the threshold of its great transformation, must show the full value of its age-old patience. A transformation that was a pure and simple alignment with certain values in current use, and already worn with use, would not lead to any substantial progress. Indeed, man does not advance along the road of happiness when he equates the degree of his civilization with the degree of progress: this equal adjustment is a natural law governing connecting vessels, which takes no account of repercussions *in animo vili*; but precisely in the act of entering into economic history, the South must transform the situation toward which it is directed and not accept it deterministically.

Otherwise we would have to admit that the world has reached a period of lethal stagnation; yet we hardly think so. And we would above all have to acknowledge the loss of a great patrimony, potential and ideal, in acquiring a material patrimony which is bound to show itself, in the long run, only as a means, not an end. Onto this juncture must be grafted a southern fiction which does not betray the inferiority complex of the new arrival; in this, a fiction is necessary which does not come forth as a duplication of the rigorous language of numbers or that of common images: a fiction which, if it shows man in the clutches of his historical destiny, also attests to the effect, on that destiny more or less transformable, of human struggle. Here Verga once again provides a good lesson with his heroes divided between Homer and the stale crust of daily bread; his historical pessimism is indeed more constructive, for the spirit, than certain blasts of hot wind.

But, granted that there exists an authentic need in the South to write, it is also curious to note that this need revealed itself when the South was rescued from a state of poverty aggravated by inertia, on top of which fell the feverish activity of a war which first manifested itself there and then went up the peninsula to its culmination and almost to a rediscovery inch by inch of an Italy, unitary in its diversity and more united, in spite of everything, precisely because of the recent and common affliction which has also exposed the hidden old wounds. I am certain that an authentic southern writer would refuse to be considered only as a southern writer: in this sense, Vittorini's "Sicily like Ohio" is still current, foreshadowed by that unconscious "Acitrezza like the walls of Troy" of Verga. It is curious, then, but understandable that the South is reawakening to fiction just at the time it is losing its characteristics as an all too typical region; it is precisely in this trend toward equality of life (when oil wells are taking the place of the abysses of its haunted and sulphurous land), that the South feels the need of a voice, as if men had again begun to speak, having rejected the idea that silence was still part of an ancient sense of dignity. The women who forget their colorful costumes put away in ancient chests set beside the straw where the human-eyed donkey lies, do not resign the soul which those costumes clothed: costumes of an ancient fabulous Orient, with Arabic

touches worthy of the women of Messina who, bedraggled, loaded stones and mortar shortly after the time of Avicenna, and who still today balance on their heads the water jug. If in some places today an aqueduct allows the woman of the South to walk with unencumbered head, that immobility of glance, as of an ancient canephora, must still be interpreted. And also interpreted must be, along with the silence of the shepherd who still roams about, the spirit of those who see bubble up in the same wilderness, from bottomless wells, a petroleum which has a value for all of Italy that the local produce of the year before did not have even for one man for one day. This feudalism of the soul, broken by the most violent transformation in the annals of any country, must be followed objectively. And this is the only realism I consider good. In this, from within, only he who senses the sundering of the bulwark of that archaic spirit, will be capable of finding objects, a wondrous plenty of objects, and of situations, worthy, like historical facts, of being known with all discretion, and with equal discretion transmitted, without commentary.

The Italian Constitutional Court

by

DAVID G. FARRELLY

[Among the innovations which have seen the light in the political life of post-war Italy, none is so fundamentally important and so little known in America as the establishment of a Constitutional Court on the pattern of our Supreme Court. As Professor Farrelly points out, recent events have focused attention on this group of men, whose actions may well decide the democratic future of Italy. As a result of the last shift in government, the very prerogatives and powers of the President of the Italian Republic have come to the fore, and a clarifying interpretation of them by the Constitutional Court may be in the offing.]

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A notable feature of Italy's post-war Constitution is its provision for a Constitutional Court — a high judicial body authorized to review legislation and acts having the force of law. Yet efforts to write a new Constitution and provide for its safeguarding were not unique. France, West Germany and Italy each revived democracy and constitutionalism after World War II. The re-establishment of popular government reflected a deep desire by the people for democracy based on the rights of individuals. There was equally strong yearning for constitutional order that would check or limit the abuses and excesses of government. In general, however, continental systems of government have been under the influences of Roman law, and, historically, executive and/or legislative power has always been predominant while courts have played a decidedly subordinate role. A break with tradition was necessary if new constitutional orders were to be protected against all-powerful legislatures or potentially dictatorial executives. Each of these three major nations

in western Europe adopted the device of a special court whose purpose would be to keep the Constitution inviolate.

Italy's break with the past was perhaps more radical than that of the other two countries. The solution in France was actually in the form of a Constitutional Committee rather than a body of independent judges. West Germany's special court is no novelty there because a similar constitutional court had existed under the Weimar Republic. But a strong, independent judiciary represents quite a departure from Italian tradition. Operating under a constitutional system which began in 1848, Parliament in practice became the governmental authority which gave final interpretation to the meaning of the basic charter and the fundamental statutes. Of course the Fascist regime recognized *no* constitutional limitations or requirements at all! To institute a special court which would watch over the new Constitution was a somewhat daring experiment for Italian statesmen to write into their Constitution.

The framers of the Constitution saw the necessity of creating a judicial organ competent to decide whether laws were enacted in conformity with the basic document. Moreover, for two particular reasons such a court was imperative: basic rights of citizens were guaranteed in the Constitution, and autonomous regions were contemplated. Civil rights and liberties can never be effectively protected against governmental interference unless the law-makers and the law-enforcers can be restrained. Historically, it seems, governments tend to be incapable of self-restraint, especially in times of crisis. As to the newly created regions, conflicts between them and the central government would naturally arise, and hence there had to be some impartial arbiter to settle differences according to the meaning of the new Constitution. This quasi-federal administrative structure was an innovation for Italy, and jurisdictional problems were anticipated. It would be impossible to preserve regional autonomy if the national government possessed the power to decide all cases of friction. Clearly an umpire was needed and the Constitutional Court was given that role.

On January 1, 1948 the Constitution of the Republic of Italy went into effect. Four articles of the lengthy document provide for the institution of judicial review (Arts.

134-137). Essentially these articles establish a Constitutional Court of fifteen judges and set forth its functions. A diffused system of appointing the judges is employed: one-third are named by the President, one-third by Parliament, and one-third by the Supreme Magistracy. The Court is charged with the following tasks: 1) to decide the constitutionality of laws and acts passed by the State and the regions; 2) to determine conflicts of jurisdiction that may arise between the State and a region; 3) to settle jurisdictional disputes between regions; 4) to act as a court of impeachment whenever charges are made against the President or ministers of the Republic. In no uncertain terms the Constitution empowers the Court to declare laws and acts invalid, and finality of decision is clearly intended — no appeal against the decisions of the Court is allowed.

It was one thing to conceive the Constitutional Court, another to give birth to it. Without enabling legislation by Parliament the Court could not come into being. Hence, it was not enough that the framers of the Constitution had given their countrymen the first European court entrusted with the power of judicial review over acts of a national Parliament and over laws of regional legislatures. Parliament had to pass statutes to establish the Court, formulate procedural rules, and enact regulations which would insure the proper functioning of the body. A long struggle ensued over the creation of the Court and the appointment of the fifteen judges.

The problem of translating the blueprint for the Court into a legal edifice was but one construction task in the overall building program laid down in the Constitution. In addition to the Constitutional Court, other structural agencies were provided for. Legislative implementation was required before many of the Constitutional provisions could become reality. In context then, the subsequent inaction and delay by Parliament as to the Court extended also to other matters. A number of reasons have been given as to why Parliament failed to exercise its responsibility. It will suffice to list a few: the exceptional difficulties of the post-war period, disruption by the Communists, the urgency of other matters, dissension among the political parties, a reversion to tradition, a slackening of reformist zeal, bureaucratic hostility,

sheer inertia and glue-footed slowness. The entire period has been described by Balladore Pallieri as one of "frightful constitutional lag," and by Piero Calamandrei as "years of withdrawal." In terms of constitutionalism the years 1948 to 1955 can only be characterized in negative words. How else can one portray a situation in which Italians had to wait eight years before there was brought into being an institution which had been authorized by the Constitution?

Two phases marked the legislative struggle to bring the Court to life. The first period lasted five years and was concerned with efforts to pass the enabling legislation. Nearly three more years went by, and this second period saw a parliamentary battle over the choice of the five judges whose selection was vested in the two houses meeting in joint session.

Prior to the April 1948 elections, a statute was enacted which concerned the Constitutional Court, but this law was brief and inconclusive. Passed in haste by the provisional Parliament, more adequate legislation was obviously needed. After the elections, with the Christian Democratic coalition firmly in control of Parliament, enabling legislation should have been forthcoming to create the Court. However, only in the last few weeks of Parliament's five-year term was action taken. In March 1953 two statutes were passed. It seems that the Government always had other, more pressing matters to enact into law. Partisan motives were behind the delay, also. Some critics believe the Christian Democrats preferred to have no Court in existence which might invalidate the Fascist police laws which were then being used to maintain control over public order and which were effectively employed against the Communists. It is clear that the Government sought to circumvent the Constitution by writing enabling legislation which would, if passed in its original form, have deprived the President of his right to appoint five judges to the Court. (The scheme was to have the five judges named by Parliament and ratified by the President.) And the Government also sought to devise a statute which would guarantee that all five parliamentary judges would be named by the center coalition, thus excluding the minority parties from an effective voice in the selection process. As finally passed, the law was so designed;

the five parliamentary judges would be elected by a three-fifths vote of both houses of Parliament rather than by a simple majority. Overly confident that the electoral bonus law would produce an automatic sixty per cent majority in the new Parliament and the Christian Democratic coalition would then be able to dominate the choice of the five Court judges, De Gasperi's party faced the electorate once more. So optimistic was the parliamentary majority that the enabling legislation for the Constitutional Court contained a provision that it should begin to function within two months!

Acting speedily, in conformity with the legislation, the Supreme Magistracy elected five judges to sit on the Court. It was to be a long time before they actually entered upon their duties; indeed, two of them died before they could take office.

With a greatly reduced voting strength in the new Parliament, as a result of the May 1953 elections, the Christian Democratic coalition found itself far short of the required three-fifths majority to elect the five Court judges. There began the second phase in the struggle to create the Constitutional Court, and nearly three years went by before the issue was resolved.

In October 1953 Parliament in joint session tried twice to elect its five judges, but no candidate received a three-fifths vote. Again, in July 1954 an effort was made to choose the judges, but this attempt was unsuccessful, too. Late in November 1955 a series of joint sessions was held, and at last five judges were elected to the bench. Immediately thereafter President Gronchi named his five judges, and, with all fifteen judges now selected, the Court was finally ready to be brought into reality.

Within Parliament the crucial moves to produce the three-fifths majority vote were instigated by Pietro Nenni, leader of the Socialist party. With some 100 votes at his command, Nenni was able to set up a compromise situation which brought about the election of Judges Ambrosini and Bracci—the former, a Christian Democrat, the latter a Socialist. Once the ice was broken, the Christian Democrats endeavored to out-manuever Nenni. Executing a political about-face, they offered their support to the Monarchists in a proposed trade which would have resulted in two more

Christian Democratic judges and one Monarchist judge. However, the center coalition itself failed to hold together on this scheme. Enough Liberals, Republicans, and left-of-center Christian Democrats deserted the coalition to shift the play back to the willing Nenni who again became the king-maker. The final compromise was a masterpiece of tactical bargaining. The end result was the election of another Christian Democrat (Cappi), a Liberal (Cassandro), and an Independent (ex-Communist Jaeger).

All fifteen judges took the oath of office in mid-December 1955. In January 1956 the Court met to organize itself, and Enrico De Nicola was elected president of the Court. Two months later the Court promulgated its rules of procedure. And in late April the judges formally began their work. Since the first judgment was announced some six weeks later, June 5, 1957 marks the first anniversary of that initial decision. Considering its heritage the Constitutional Court has accomplished a great deal in its first year of operation.

Meeting together for organization purposes in January 1956, the fifteen jurists constituted a group of older men, rich in practical experience. The average age was sixty-five. At seventy-eight, Enrico De Nicola was the oldest; the youngest was Cassandro who had not yet reached his forty-third birthday. All were learned in the law, and at least six members were veteran judges. Nine of the Court held academic positions and were scholars of note in their fields of specialization. No less than eight had written extensively on juridical subjects. At least three members were active in party politics before elevation to the Court. De Nicola was in a category by himself — an elder statesman who had been Italy's Provisional President and, at the time of his appointment to the bench, Senator for Life. Six judges had been in the Constituent Assembly in 1947, and three of these had served on the committee which drafted the Constitution (Ambrosini, Cappi, Perassi).

During the Court's first year there were changes in its personnel. Fortunately perhaps, death occurred among those judges whose appointment is vested in the magistracy or in the President of the Republic. Otherwise, had a parliamentary judge been subject to replacement, another partisan

political fight might have been aroused in Parliament. To replace Capograssi who died before the Court's first decision was announced, Gronchi appointed Petrocelli. This selection had political overtones for Petrocelli had been the Monarchist's candidate in the parliamentary voting, and the Monarchist party felt bitter about being deprived of representation on the Court. Manca, a non-political jurist, was chosen by the Supreme Magistracy in place of Lampis who died shortly after the Court's initial decision was announced. The third change in personnel came in March 1957 when De Nicola resigned and Gronchi named Sandulli to fill that vacancy. At forty-one, Aldo Sandulli is currently the "baby" on the bench.

The Consulta Palace in Rome is the home of the Constitutional Court. There, on a sunny April day, the new institution began its formal work. At that time there was much to be done. Nearly 200 cases awaited consideration and disposition. Facing this herculean task, De Nicola's inaugural address reveals that the Court was alert to the historic role it could play in a Republic based on the sovereignty of the people. What the Court did in the immediate future would make it a successful, respected institution of government, or it could fail to win acceptance, fail to achieve prestige and esteem from the public. It was a statesmanlike move on the part of the Court to postpone the announcement of its first judgment until after the nation-wide administrative elections. Aware of trouble, the Court took no chances that its initial decision might be subverted to the partisan advantage or disadvantage of any political party in the election campaigns. Such shrewdness augured well for the Court's future status.

It would be foolish to say that the attention of everyone in Italy was riveted on the Constitutional Court. Nevertheless it is true that there was considerable interest on the part of the general public. For one thing there were specific cases that had attracted a wide following, and the press reported the course of many of these suits as they made their way to the Court's agenda. In the second place, there had been for years some fundamental, broad questions of jurisdiction which the Court would have to answer sooner or later. Laymen as a whole were relatively well informed of the

basic controversies that the Court would someday be called upon to decide. Of course within the legal profession the technical aspects of these profound questions were argued back and forth. The root of the difficulty can be traced to the early post-war years when the unresolved problems of jurisdiction were first noticed and speculation about them began.

There were really two basic problems of jurisdiction. The first dates back to 1947 when the Constitution was written. Only in brief, general terms were the functions of the Court set forth; details were left for Parliament to write into law. Nowhere, in the Constitution or in statutes, is anything said about the Court's role in judging the constitutionality of laws passed prior to the adoption of the post-war Constitution. What has complicated the problem is the continuation in force of laws and decrees promulgated in the Imperial and Fascist eras. Basically the jurisdictional question is this: can the Court extend its power of review to laws which were in existence prior to January 1, 1948?

To students of American jurisprudence the answer is obvious, and the history of our own Supreme Court supplies a positive reply. However, there was much speculation in Italy on this problem; various theories were announced and several distinct schools of thought emerged. From the viewpoint of the new Constitutional Court this jurisdictional question had practical implications. Public opinion could very well be alienated if the Court established the right to roam back through a century of history and strike down laws enacted during the period of the Monarchy and Fascist years. Those persons who were nostalgic for the past might resent all action taken against old laws; also, depending upon the particular law that was challenged, others might oppose the Court's decisions because of the substantive issue involved.

Polemic arguments were brushed aside when the Court announced its first decision. The great jurisdictional problem was thus settled at once and has been laid to rest. The Constitutional Court held that any anterior laws which are contrary to the preceptive norms of the Constitution must be subject to review by the Court. In other words, by authority of the Constitution the Court has the power to judge

the constitutionality of all laws, whether anterior or not. With this decision the Court disposed of its most troublesome and fundamental problem. Precedent was thereby established for any future litigation involving old laws.

The second major problem had a more practical origin. Article 116 of the Constitution provides for the establishment of autonomous regions, and the Statute of Sicily (1946) was approved by Parliament as a constitutional law in 1948. Under the Statute of Sicily a special High Court was provided and empowered to judge the constitutionality of laws in terms of their conformity with the regional Statute. It should be noted that national laws as well as regional laws could be reviewed by the High Court of Sicily. To complicate matters the Sicilian High Court came into existence and was in actual operation before the Constitutional Court began its life. Here was another thorny issue: could there exist two courts, each possessing jurisdiction over the constitutional questions affecting Sicily?

Many people expected that the constitutional jurisdiction of the High Court of Sicily would end when the Constitutional Court began to function. Specifically, they thought the High Court of Sicily would be deprived of this jurisdiction on the grounds that the Constitution did not authorize a constitutional court for an autonomous region. The issue came first to the fore when the judicial status of Ambrosini, Bracci, and Perassi was questioned. These three judges were members of the High Court of Sicily at the time of their appointment to the Constitutional Court. Thus, in effect, each held two judicial offices! (The Constitutional Court determines the qualifications of its members.) The Constitutional Court resolved this problem by allowing its three members to hold a concurrent position on the Sicilian High Court, thus side-stepping the underlying issue for the moment.

In February 1957 the issue came directly before the Constitutional Court in a case involving conflict between the national government and the region. Counsel for the State argued that the constitutional jurisdiction of the High Court of Sicily must be terminated; both legal and practical arguments were advanced to support this position. On its part counsel for Sicily maintained that its High Court is authorized by a constitutional statute and only Parliament

can alter or take away its jurisdiction. It has been reported in the press that the Constitutional Court has now ruled on the issue, holding against the constitutional jurisdiction of the Sicilian High Court. However, this decision does not solve the matter, even though it may be judicially settled. Needed now is legislative action to correct the anomaly. Parliament must tackle this problem and amend the Statute of Sicily so it will conform to the judicial mandate. This is a political responsibility and outside the province of the Constitutional Court.

As we have seen there were two great jurisdictional issues which had to be resolved for the Constitutional Court to emerge in its own right as authoritative interpreter of the Constitution. The Court itself was cognizant of the importance of these basic problems and the necessity that they be solved correctly. In the light of American experience with similar problems in the early days of our Supreme Court, Italy's Constitutional Court has taken the only path that, in the long run, will avoid future difficulties for itself and benefit the nation, too.

Statistically, the work of the Court has been impressive, especially when one recalls that some 200 cases were ready for hearing at the time the Court began its labors. In 1956, 22 decisions were announced and 12 orders were promulgated. The first few months of 1957 saw another 37 decisions, and further orders were announced. (A decision involves a written opinion whereas an order is a summary disposition of a case on grounds of no merit or that the issue has previously been settled in a similar case.) This production of written opinions, some sixty of them, compares favorably with the annual work load of the U. S. Supreme Court. But the number of decisions does not tell the whole story and is no measure of the Court's efficiency. Cases that are alike in content are considered together and disposed of in a single decision. In the Court's first decision, for example, thirty individual cases were combined and settled in the one decree. No less than 70 matters were thus taken care of in the Court's first 22 decisions.

At the risk of over-simplification we can illustrate the nature of the Court's business by dividing its decisions into two main groups. It is possible in this way to focus upon

the leading problems that have been presented to the Court and to show the judicial response to vexing public questions.

When the Court began to function there were literally dozens of cases on its agenda which dealt with police matters. Conflicts between law-enforcement authorities and individual citizens occur in every country. Civil liberties in a constitutional democracy can never be absolute freedoms, but, subject to reasonable regulation for the good of the community, man is guaranteed certain basic rights: free speech and press, freedom from arbitrary arrest, freedom of worship, etc. The post-war problem in Italy was such that rather stringent police measures were necessary to maintain order. Exercise of the police powers was based upon the Public Security laws, many of which antedated the Constitution. There were, for instance, several royal decrees issued in the nineteenth century which regulated public security; and the 1931 decrees, issued during the Fascist period, were perhaps the most irritating of all. Even though many of these laws were patently out of harmony with the rights of citizens as set forth in the Constitution, the laws and regulations remained in effect. Enforcement officers invoked them widely giving rise to many penal cases which were transferred to the Constitutional Court.

The Court has carved a middle road through these cases. It has carefully distinguished and allowed the police power to be used in some situations; in other cases the Court has held that enforcement officers have transgressed upon the personal liberties of citizens.

A few examples will illustrate the type of restriction which has withstood challenge on constitutional grounds: 1) a law of 1956 requiring publishers to designate a responsible person to assume criminal and civil liability for what it printed; 2) regulation of newspaper vendors in the public streets; 3) the requirement that a license must be obtained before an assembly or meeting can be held in a public place; 4) the right of police to send a suspected person back to his commune if a court order is secured to accomplish his removal. It will be seen that such regulations of the press, or the right to public meetings, or freedom of movement can be allowed if they are reasonable and their enforcement is according to due process.

In other civil liberty matters, however, the Court has decided in favor of the individual. A law requiring a license from the police for the display of placards, posters and signs was declared unconstitutional as an abridgement of freedom of expression and thought. Likewise invalid was the law which authorized provincial commissions to declare curfew regulations under which people deemed socially dangerous would be confined to their homes from sunset until the next morning. Also struck down as illegitimate was the system of compulsory expatriation whereby a person could be ordered by police to return to his commune and there report to his local authorities. In March 1957 a significant decision was handed down; it was held that non-Catholic cults are entitled to worship freely in the Republic. (The Pope has censured the Court for this.)

Problems growing out of the relationships of the State and the autonomous regions, and between provinces and regions, have produced many cases for the Court. Italy still has a unitary government; in structure and administration this is the system that has existed for years. However, the new Constitution recognized the principle of decentralization and local autonomy, and Parliament has authorized special autonomous status for some regions. Sardinia, Sicily, Trentino-Alto Adige, and Val d'Aosta as the autonomous regions have been the source of litigation as to their respective rights under the Constitution and basic statutes. One notes that neither the Constitution nor the special regional statutes delegate local powers with much precision, therefore numerous problems exist over what matters are exclusively national, what are concurrent, what are purely local.

In the decisions made by the Constitutional Court thus far, the trend seems to be that national power is upheld on most issues. Thus, the following are examples of matters which the Court has said are national powers that may be delegated: land reform; public buildings and antiquities; the tourist trade and the hotel industry. When these matters are assigned or delegated to the regions for regulation, the central government retains the right to supervise their administration, modify regulations, and otherwise control them.

On the other hand there are matters held by the Court to involve concurrent power: authority to compel liquidation

of the credit business; regulation of bus lines and tramways; control of waterways and electrical energy; enforcement of police laws. In each of the above cases the region argued that the power was local and hence beyond national control, but the Court did not agree.

Clearly the problems of regional autonomy will provoke continued controversy and the Court will find this a busy area for decision. Of the 22 decisions in 1956, no less than 14 were concerned with regions; of the first 15 decisions in 1957, there were 10 cases involving regions. One can appreciate that the Italian equivalent of our American federal-state relations means work for the Court.

Within the short span of its life the Court has had two crises which merit emphasis. In September last year president De Nicola announced his intention to resign from the Court. There were many rumors why he wanted to leave his post. In the main the issue seems to have been the unresponsiveness on the part of the Government to the Court's decisions against the police laws. Certainly De Nicola knew that the essence of judicial review lies in the acceptance by the public and the Government of the Court's decisions. Taking advantage of his enormous prestige, De Nicola chose to focus attention on the continued existence of the Fascist police laws which remained on the books (and were still being applied). The personal intervention of Prime Minister Segni kept De Nicola from going through with his resignation, and the autumn session of the Court found him back at work.

However, in March of this year De Nicola again offered his resignation. This time it was a most serious move; his friends and top Government officials could not make him change his mind. De Nicola's resignation was accepted. Again, rumors flew as to his reasons for quitting: the continued, uncurbed existence of the High Court of Sicily; criticisms by Christian Democrats in the Chamber on the work of the Court; the opposition of the Church to the Court's decision on freedom of worship for all faiths, etc.

The Court proceeded to elect Gaetano Azzariti as its new president early in April. Ironically, President Gronchi appointed a member of the High Court of Sicily to replace De Nicola.

It would seem that the Court has, in its first year of operation, established itself as an institution. De Nicola's resignations have served the purpose of arousing public opinion to support the Court. After all, the Court has no way of enforcing its decisions, no power of purse or sword. Like the U. S. Supreme Court it is dependent upon the will of government officials and the general public to abide by its decisions — willingness to live under law. Public opinion is the ultimate force that can be used in a democracy to support the Court and counteract opposition on the part of elected representatives. As a great and respected statesman, De Nicola guided the Constitutional Court through its critical first year. There is no reason to believe that Azzariti will be less skillful in managing the Court's internal affairs.

In its difficult first year the Court has protected the spirit and principles of the Constitution without doing violence to the nation's political traditions. It has been prudent and generally conservative, yet it has not hesitated to announce strong decisions. An outside observer can only admire the Court's courageous start and to conclude that despite future problems a successful foundation has been laid.

Enrico De Nicola has delineated the basic issue even though his resignation seems to have been prompted by mixed motives. The Court by itself cannot keep democracy alive in Italy, nor does it possess the means to implement the Constitution. This would seem to be the lesson De Nicola wants to drive home. It is up to Parliament to clarify the functions of the High Court of Sicily; the Constitutional Court has spoken. It is up to the Government to press for the election of the 16 standby judges who have not yet been chosen but who will be needed if there are impeachments to try. Legislation is required to protect the independence and prestige of the highest judges. Defenders, not critics of the Court, are needed at this hour. In sum, there is unfinished business in the Republic! Back in the political arena, as Senator for Life, De Nicola can continue to serve his country well.

TRENDS



THE THEATRICAL SEASON

Despite the renewal of interest in the theater, sparked in the provinces by television which has discovered actors like Lea Padovani and revived neglected texts, the theatrical season, properly speaking, has closed its doors even earlier than in former years. As early as late April, cities like Rome and Naples had ceased to present their audiences with anything much of interest, and Milan was slipping in the direction of summer repertory sustained by the usual flock of "thrillers," together with the indispensable Roussin and the evergreen Feydeau.

In short, the 1957 season adds up to less than last year, perhaps because of the absence of a director like Ettore Giannini, not to mention the absence of Luchino Visconti (in demand for films and opera, where he can give the freest vent to his baroque flights), or because of the crisis of the Piccolo Teatro of Rome, not to mention the crisis of the Piccolo Teatro of Milan, shaken by a controversy, which was resolved only *in extremis*, between the director Giorgio Strehler and his producer Paolo Grassi. Still, the Piccolo of Milan has taken a step forward this year, moving as it is in the direction of an Italian and a popular repertory. Indeed, immediately after the revival of Goldoni's *Arlecchino servo di due padroni* (splendidly acted by Marcello Moretti), they produced an old and little known work of the poet Pompeo Bettini (recognized, until yesterday, only by Benedetto Croce, who several years ago published with Laterza the complete poems, amid critical indifference), entitled *La guerra*, written in collaboration with Ettore Albini in Milanese dialect at the beginning of the century. While for scholars this script has been a sort of pleasant surprise, for devotees of the theater it has established a new, young, well-equipped director, Virginio Puecher; he has risen from

a position of assistant to that of director with assurance and authority, particularly in his control over actors accustomed to pedantic and introverted delivery.

Another work of great interest presented by the Piccolo Teatro of Milan under the direction of Giorgio Strehler was Federico Zardi's play on the French Revolution, *I giacobini* ("The Jacobins"). At first it had seemed that Vittorio Gassman would shoulder the risk of this undertaking, all the more a risk because of the "epic" length of the text and the number of characters in it; but instead Gassman preferred to turn his attention to the easier and sprightlier panorama of the same playwright, *I tromboni* ("The Windbags"). So once again it was up to Strehler to impose on the fickleness and indolence of the public a script like *I giacobini*, in itself almost "exhausting," which aroused sympathetic but also antagonistic responses, thus evoking the sort of discussion that will certainly be taken up in France as soon as the play, translated by the Belgian comedy writer Jean Blondel, appears on the Parisian stage.

And now, having mentioned Vittorio Gassman, we should recall his romantic and strenuous interpretation of *Othello*, in which Salvo Randone literally outclassed him in vigor and controlled desperation (the two of them exchanged, from one evening to the next, the parts of Othello and Iago); and in which young Anna Maria Ferrero gave further proof of her scant and insecure familiarity with conditions behind the footlights: an indication, all in all, that it is easy to go from stage to cinema, but very rarely indeed from cinema to stage. On the other hand, the audiences, especially women, followed Gassman's performances with gushing enthusiasm (in Bologna, for example, the police had to intervene), granting *Othello* and *I tromboni* their unconditional fealty. In this latter work, Gassman showed the breadth of his capabilities by impersonating eight different characters, caricatures of "windbags" in our society, from the psychiatrist to the grandiloquent lawyer, from the theatrical director to the member of parliament. In actual fact, the success of the work was assured in advance and therefore devalued, since it was easy to recognize in the caricatures certain well known personages, such as the actor-director Vittorio De Sica, the journalist Indro Montanelli,

and several others.

Two theatrical companies have held to an exceptionally profitable course, those in the dialect of Naples and Venice (though it may be more proper to speak of the Neapolitan and Venetian *nations*, and of *languages* not dialects), directed respectively by Eduardo De Filippo and by Cesco Baseggio. The first, buoyed up this season by the youthful vitality of Vittoria Moriconi, has brought back two old plays, one by Raffaele Viviani and the other by Gino Rocca. The second, in celebration of the 250th anniversary of Goldoni's birth, has acted the best of Goldoni, as well as *La Moscheta* of Angelo Beolco (called "il Ruzzante," 1502-1542). Unfortunately, this work is unknown to the public at large, which finds itself in the position of having to overcome the obstacle of a dead language, Paduan, a rich literary mixture of rustic dialects spoken in the Po Valley. For those who overcome the obstacle, the work emerges charged with vibrant dramatic tension and poetic forcefulness. It was a shame then that Baseggio's courageous attempt should have been overborne by the obtuseness of the censor, who intervened and, with the dead weight of authority, stopped the performances. And il Ruzzante's encounter with the censor was not an isolated case, since like measures were taken against a young theatrical company headed by Achille Millo and Valeria Moriconi, after the first performance of *Vincenzo De Pretore*, the new play of Eduardo De Filippo.

Among touring companies, those worthy of mention are Renzo Ricci's and Eva Magni's who had great success with Eugene O'Neill's *A Long Day's Journey into Night*, and the company of Anna Proclemer and Giorgio Albertazzi, who presented Michael Gazzo's Broadway success *A Hatful of Rain*, the young Guido Rocca's *I coccodrilli*, and Peter Ustinov's international success *The Love of Four Colonels*, which marked the collapse of the directorial pretensions of the former popular singer Lucio Ardenzi.

We should not fail to mention the company composed of Olga Villi, Andreina Pagnani, Gabriele Ferzetti and Arnoldo Foà, all highly respected actors who nevertheless presented two rather weak and colorless renditions of Shaw and Pirandello; and the youthful company vigorously led by Anna Maria Guarnieri, who was indeed exceptional, and

disciplined by the knowing and measured direction of Giorgio De Lullo, galvanized the emotive capabilities of their audiences with a splendid performance of the *Diary of Anne Frank*.

A word, perhaps, might be devoted to the company of Laura Adani and Gerola, but it would commit us to excessive forbearance, and for that reason it is best to go on and consider the *teatri stabili*, the permanent companies, of Genoa and Turin.

Of the two the first is clearly best; it ventured to produce Giraudoux's *Ondine* (a text to be left to the memory of Juvet who was skilful enough to bring off the repartee), Salvato Cappelli's *Il diavolo Peter*, and a stage version of Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* prepared by Diego Fabbri, in which the only thing "possessed" was the embarrassed glance of the actor Gigetto Cimara, catapulted from the bourgeois parlors where he is accustomed to move in dinner jacket with a glass of whisky in hand, into what are for him the psychological obscurities of an author he must never have read.

It is for the sake of completeness that I also mention the permanent theater of Trieste, whose presiding genius, Laura Solari, is well along in years and somewhat stiff in the joints, and the permanent theater of Sicily headed by the ageing Vincenzo Tieri, who still identifies avant-garde theater with the plays of Arnaldo Fraccaroli. On the other hand, the permanent theater of Naples deserves much better mention; after losing the bouncing youthful Franca May, who took off, under the wing of the big-time producer Remigio Paone, for the world of vaudeville, retrenched by signing up the French actress Hélène Remy, blonde, elegant and refined, indeed more Neapolitan than the Neapolitans.

By way of conclusion, the permanent theaters that remain are those of Emilia and Bolzano. But the first opened toward the end of the season, and therefore one may say that it has traveled along the road of good intentions; the second sustained the loss, during its winter rehearsals, of the great actor Memo Benassi, who, succumbing to a heart attack, has gone to meet in theatrical heaven the shade of Eleanora Duse, his only teacher.

G. A. CIBOTTO

BOOKS

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VENICE REVISITED

It would be idle to speculate on what may have caused, in the present historical and cultural situation of Italy, a flourishing of "local" studies; the quality and scope of "local" traditions amply justify an interest in such studies at any time, and preserve them from suspicions of provincial chauvinism. Venice is, of course, an obvious instance. Recently two publications have been brought out, or rather initiated, as useful for an organized knowledge of Venetian history and literature as any that have so far appeared in our century. The first is a history of Venice, *Storia di Venezia* (Venice: Centro internazionale delle arti e del costume, vol. I, 1956) which will eventually comprise 16 volumes, under the general editorship of Roberto Cessi. The second is an anthology of Venetian lyric poetry, *Il fiore della lirica veneziana*, edited by Manlio Dazzi (Venice: Neri Pozza, vols. I and II, 1956), to be completed by two further volumes probably within the current year.

Not only local subjects, then, but also local publishers. The "International Centre of Arts and Costume," publisher of the first work, has its Venetian

seat in the newest of the great palaces on the Grand Canal, the 18th-century Palazzo Grassi; it is a generously endowed institution with manifold activities (e.g., in the theatre). The scholars who under its auspices have undertaken this new history of Venice, obviously intend to do, around the middle of our century, what the historian Romanin did, around the middle of the nineteenth, with the 10 volumes of his classic *Storia documentata di Venezia*.

The publisher of the other work reviewed here, Neri Pozza, is very possibly the most intelligent and courageous new publisher to appear in Italy during the postwar period. Though he publishes also fiction and poetry (for instance the original edition of Montale's latest book of poems, *La bufera e altro*), his present important trend is toward philology and criticism; in fact, he seems partly to inherit, at an almost opposite end of the peninsula, some of the traditions of the illustrious house of Laterza.

The first volume of the *Storia* is concerned with the ages "from pre-history to history" and includes four sections: a general one on natural environment; a second one covering

the "paleo-Venetian," pre-Roman, period; a central one, written by the general editor himself, Roberto Cessi (the greatest living authority on early Venetian history), titled "From Rome to Byzantium;" and finally a review of archaeological materials, by Giovanni Brusin, "Roman and Early Christian Monuments." In other words, all of this first volume is occupied by the pre-history and early history of the territory before Venice itself came into existence. The fascination of this study is obvious to anyone, even, so to speak, poetically; the geographical configuration of the Venetian territory, described in the early part of the book, and especially certain aspects of lagoon landscape, which are in some ways untouched today, suggest a mixture of continuity and mystery which is part of the unique attraction of the place. Indeed many of the problems handled in the historical sections of this volume are characterized by their hopeless insolubility; "Venetian" history, even of the Roman and early Christian periods, often presents a series of enigmas somehow held together by hypothesis. In spite of this situation, or, in fact, partly because of it, this area and period — when Rome was declining and Venice itself had not yet appeared — offer even to the general reader and interested visitor an extraordinary example of the varied complexity in the formation of Italian history. From this first volume of the quite profusely illus-

trated *Storia di Venezia* one gathers the impression that after quantities of partial studies (the bibliographies to each chapter are very inclusive) a general gathering of materials was overdue. The following fifteen volumes have been planned with an equal balance — and a rather clear separation — between strict history and *Kulturgeschichte*. For instance the second, from the origins of the duchy (*dogado*) of Venice to the Fourth Crusade, will have separate sections on "politics, economics and religion," and on "arts and monuments." The general plan of the work follows similar lines; for instance, the seventh volume will be entirely devoted to political, administrative, and judicial institutions from the time of the creation of the basic *Maggior Consiglio* to the fifteenth century; while the eighth, ninth, and tenth volumes will be respectively devoted to religious institutions, economic history, and literature and the arts up to the Renaissance. The same simple method is followed in the latter part of the plan, with one volume, the fifteenth, devoted to costumes and domestic traditions — presumably an up-to-date substitute for Pompeo Molmenti's now classic history of Venetian private life. The sixteenth and last volume will naturally end with 1866, the year in which Venice was annexed to the kingdom of Italy.

An anthology of Venetian poetry was also overdue. The one by Antonio Pilot (1913) is now hardly satisfactory;

others are even less full and reliable. Francesco Pasinetti's long and loving work in collecting materials for a projected anthology was interrupted by his untimely death. Now Manlio Dazzi's four-volume *Fiore della lirica veneziana*, will be by far the largest and most accurately edited and annotated collection available. The adjective *veneziana* is intended here in the larger sense for which often the word *veneta* is instead used, as in the case of painting (*pittura veneta*); the qualification is important because it means that the poetry includes not only the speech of Venice but also the languages called "rustic" (*rusteghi*), including the *pavano* which is the language of Ruzante and others. The problem, to mention only this one among those handled by Dazzi in his introduction, is interesting also because of the subtle relationship between Venetian poetry and the development of the Italian lyric in general; "rustic" speech may have been a useful reaction to what Dazzi calls *ibridismo italo-veneto*, engendered in such poets as Pisani or Giustinian by the spreading of the Dante and Petrarch cults. At any rate, Dazzi observes, a Venetian poetic speech is consistently to be recognized throughout the long centuries of Venetian cultural history; and even certain distinctive definitions in terms of tone and materials are not in the least unwarranted. Although these first volumes include such relatively major figures as Maffio Venier (1550-

1586) and Antonio Lamberti (1757-1832), the two further volumes will be necessary in order to give some general conclusions their proper perspective. The concluding remarks in Dazzi's introduction are an inviting anticipation: in contrast, of course, to the dreamy, mollified, touristic views of the Venetian temper, the major quality of poetry in the Venetian language is given as "the concrete and fruitful presence of reality," denoting a civilization which is "scaltrita e sorniona insieme, stupefatta e sapiente, letteratissima e mercantile." An inevitable final remark is on the present status of the Venetian language. Far from being dead, as any properly equipped visitor may realize, it is now most usually spoken by Venetians among themselves, of whatever age; all are, of course, bilingual. But more importantly, there is in our time a veritable flourishing of poets in Venetian; the final section of this anthology will probably present some of the most valuable poems in the whole collection, by such contemporary authors as Palmieri, Giotti, and the best of them all, Giacomo Noventa.

It seems, to conclude, that both these works, the *Storia* and the *Fiore*, when completed, will be indispensable in any library that includes Venice and its history and culture; Venice which, in its turn, is one of the inevitable items in any description of civilization as we know it.

[P. M. P.]

THEY "DID WELL"

The author, Lawrence F. Pisanì, an associate professor of Sociology, informs the reader that he was led to write his recent book *The Italian in America* (New York: Exposition Press, 1957) by the observation that books about the Italian-Americans are surprisingly scarce on the library shelves of the nation. This does not mean, however, that the subject is entirely new; in fact, the bibliography placed at the end of the volume presents ample evidence that various aspects of his topic had already attracted the attention of numerous writers.

The author starts with the very first trickle of Italian immigration into the United States, and tries to show what contributions were made by the sons of Italy to this country from its very infancy. In the early chapters the author has gathered together a plethora of interesting and often little known information: that one third of Magellan's crew in his voyage around the globe were Italians; that Enrico Tonti was probably the earliest explorer of the Mississippi region; that Giacomo Beltrami probably discovered the source of the Mississippi; that in his quest for the golden city of El Dorado, Coronado sent a Fra Marco da Nizza ahead to test the truth of the Indians' tales about the existence of such a city; that Italian silk workers were brought to the United States to initiate the silk industry; and so on.

Equally interesting are the

passages dealing with the immigration of large groups of Italians, solicited by American agents for the purpose of agricultural colonization in the southern part of the country; the woes of many of these immigrants, and the woes of the industrial laborers who settled in the cities. Woes which can be traced back to many and sundry causes: ignorance of the English language; debts made to secure the passage of other relatives; trade unions which at first were opposed to the introduction of Italian laborers; racial prejudices, etc.

After laying the ground work, as it were, the author proceeds to show how in a relatively short time the Italian immigrants adjusted themselves to the new ways of life of their adopted country, and how, especially in the second and third generations, they rapidly moved up the economic and social ladder. The later chapters deal with such topics as "Italian-American Amusements," "Italian-American Literature," "Artists and Musicians," and "Scientists;" in short, one is conscious of a definite effort to highlight the contribution made by Italo-Americans to that vast canvas which is the American scene.

The subject of Professor Pisanì's book is undoubtedly interesting, but its treatment is not entirely satisfactory. Some of the chapters, apparently written in the belief that in numbers there is always strength, are choked by endless lists of Italians who "did well." These lists may actually do the

book more harm than good, for it is highly doubtful that the "American" reader — or any other reader for that matter — will be impressed by the fact that a certain Italian-American is a dentist in town X, another is a police officer, and another a banker. At times one gets the impression of reading the telephone directory of a small Italian community. This is especially so, since the majority of the people whose names were chosen by the author reside in two or three localities with which the author is directly acquainted. To be of any value such lists should have been cut down to include only figures of national significance. On the other hand, if the author wanted to impress the reader with endless lists of Italians, why omit practically all of the distinguished Italo-Americans of, say, the San Francisco Bay area, of the Los Angeles and Hollywood colonies, and of many others in other parts of the country? And, speaking of the Far West, California and other western States fare rather badly in Prof. Pisani's book. The reader who is acquainted with the Pacific coast will certainly be surprised to find that only the Asti Italian wineries receive a passing mention. Not a word about the nationally known Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco or the thousands of Italian fishermen in Monterey and San Pedro, or the immense Guasti vineyards of southern California, or the vast orchards of Di Giorgio (written up in *Life* a few years ago) near Bakersfield.

In conclusion, the book is interesting in spots, but it is uneven and not properly balanced.

[C. S.]

INGREDIENTS FOR TRAVEL BOOKS

Edith Templeton, the author of the *Surprise of Cremona* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1957), is to be commended on the elegant taste with which she has chosen the places to visit for her book: Cremona, Parma, Mantua, Ravenna, Urbino, Arezzo. It is the itinerary of the past, of the writers of the eighteenth century particularly. Indeed, almost the only recent literary travellers to take this route were Sitwells.

Mrs. Templeton has determined not only to make an unusual trip but, apparently, to write an unusual book about it. Her trip begins in Cremona and she finds her title there, but not before she has, with a kind of pleasant and homely wonderment, wandered through streets of palaces that are "distinguished" and "understated," speculated on the landscape and local history, picked up the recipe for a simple sauce and thought, not without perception, about Frederick II and his harem and the "eternal drawing room" in which dwelt Vergil's shepherds and Marie Antoinette. Along the way she has encountered locals, the comic children of the travel book, whether inn-keepers or professors, and from one of them she learns the story of a French general in Cremona,

and so the author's stay there ends with a premonitory flop.

Mrs. Templeton's talent for seeing little things and rendering them meaningful through rumination is considerable. Her impressions of Lord Byron's letter, written on the last leaf of a copy of *Corinne*, to Teresa Guiccioli are almost moving. And there is a certain flair for description which, when direct, is effective. The picture of the arches of the Gonzaga palace — "they are dark red brick and pointed, their virile outlines seamed with square white stones . . ." — is delivered without any attitude being taken and is imposing. Nor should the friendliness of the author's recollections of her childhood, and an aunt who figured in it, go uncomplicated. But along with these qualities Mrs. Templeton brings in her luggage a set of personal crotchets, idiosyncracies and dislikes — elements, when interesting, that produce unusual perspectives and remarkable books — which she cannot attach to the Italian scene.

People who have been in Italy will know the places. (The names are evocative.) And they will recognize, behind the highly personal reactions, the types of people whom the author meets. Her "tired ones," for instance, described as rich, unemployed men, falteringly lecherous, exist, and not without their charm. But people who have not been to Italy will tend to see these, and other, persons and cities through the eyes of someone to whom they must seem the same in all

countries. To a penchant for prefabricated vision Mrs. Templeton adds a feeling that if humor is a happy, it is also a necessary, ingredient of travel books and that it may be introduced into them by injection. Her injections are of various kinds. When she describes the Bourbon palace at Colorno (" . . . Bibbiena was the greatest architect of his day, but when he designed Colorno he must have been constipated") there is the desperate humor of the cocktail napkin, and this sort of remark is prevalent in the "Surprise." There is also an amount of dialect, sometimes of that kind of Italo-Brooklynese which has never been spoken save in books. It is perhaps less out of a desire to be funny than out of idiosyncrasy that she states, so archly, her dislike of Italian bread and Castiglione, which are in the same degree as her preference for Cremona mustard, Vergil and Napoleon. And it is probably caprice which leads to her embarrassingly cute division of architecture into foie-gras and whipped cream.

Mrs. Templeton moves from town to town, café to café, making her little jokes, liking and disliking food, seeing the significance of minor situations, having flashes of descriptive power over fragments of landscape, until she meets her aunt in Como, where ends the road which has taken her past all these noble places which are still to be rediscovered.

[Stanford Drew]

APOLOGIA PRO DUCE

The chief and perhaps sole importance of Luigi Villari's *Italian Foreign Policy under Mussolini* (New York: Devon-Adair, 1956) lies in the fact that it was published at all. Luigi Villari is described by his publishers as a "great scholar," and his work is called a "serious contribution to the historical record of our times," but Mr. Villari is, in fact, not a scholar at all; he is a notorious fascist propagandist who at the age of eighty-one is still insisting that Mussolini was always right, and his book could be regarded as history only by fervent fascists and all other gullible people who might believe that there is more than the slightest merit in "the other side of the case." If Mr. Villari's cherished system had ever prevailed, we can be sure that its defeated enemies would have found no firm of Devon-Adair to bring out their side of the argument.

Revision and re-interpretation are not only legitimate in historical study, they may well be its life breath, and the informed reader has a right to know facts that have been obscured by the smoke of battle and the smell of polemic. But to perpetuate lies, to insist on a palpably distorted version of events and to praise the rightness of a cause that was one of the worst ever in the world is to do serious injury to history and present an insult to the reader's intelligence. Unfortunately, there is an audience for this kind of revisionism. Disenchantment and disillusion are

natural enough when the golden age does not succeed immediately on the sacrifices made to attain it, and it is always possible to believe that the evils of "before the war" (whichever war that may be) were not really as great as those that confront us today. Thus, that good father of his people, Benito Mussolini, can now appear as one who never wished or did any harm, who raised his loving children from the status of "Wops" — as *Time* told us in July of 1936 — and who was finally and ungratefully martyred at Dongo. Here is a particularly attractive image to be venerated by the ignorant, the bewildered and the congenitally wrongheaded. After all, he did not actually kill as many people as did Hitler or Stalin (or Genghis Khan); he received abundant praise from Winston Churchill and other statesmen with equal reputations for consistency and a sense of moral proportion, and, finally, fascism was widely praised in America except by the counterparts of Mussolini's Italian enemies. These enemies, according to Villari, belong to the vague but commodious category of "malcontents," or they are in the mixed bag of socialists, liberals, communists and, of course, rich Jews who are loyal only to the regime that they set up in Moscow. In fact, and here is a revelation, Mussolini's enemies have only one crime in common; they are "anti-fascists."

As we well know, Mussolini's many friends in America, Britain and France turned

against him only when they realized that his foreign policy was really as mad as it had always sounded. To Mr. Villari this is nearly incomprehensible wickedness, for his hero would have saved us all from communism and worse if he had only been listened to. Then again, the author holds that the western conspiracy against fascist foreign policy was actually inspired by a wide-spread aversion to fascism, something concerning Italians alone. So it goes, double-think and no-think, hand in hand, just so long as the Duce is always right. It is bad enough that Mussolini's supposed realism led his country to ruin and almost into the hands of a formidable communist party and that his essential encouragement of Hitler brought Russia far to the west, but it is far worse to realize that he based himself on the unforgivable crime of despising his fellow men. Villari joins then in insulting the dignity of all Italians who remained men while they toiled like beasts for the good of their children and the love of their land. Villari is at his warmest when he praises Mussolini because he was fundamentally a journalist and saw all with a journalist's eye, but are we to believe, as we easily can from this account, that he did it all for publicity? Are we to believe also that the headlines and bloody excitement were worth the price to those poor people who needed "discipline," those builders of rocky terraces, pruners of vines and back-crooked wielders of the

ancestral *zappa*? Luigi Villari's distinctions remain those he had at birth — a reputable historian for a father and a talented Englishwoman for a mother.

[George T. Romani]

MORAVIA'S AND SOLDATI'S NEW HEROINES

The two outstanding fictional works of the quarter are again by authors known to the English-reading public: *La ciociara*, by Alberto Moravia (Milan: Bompiani, 1957) and *Il vero Silvestri* ("The Real Silvestri") by Mario Soldati (Milan: Garzanti, 1957) whose earlier novel, *The Capri Letters*, was brought out by Knopf last year. Moravia and Soldati, extremely different as they are as literary artists, have in common an emphasis on craftsmanship, a routine professional quality, which is not too usual among respectable writers. This quality is reflected, as a matter of fact, also in their practical life. Moravia is not only a novelist but a constant contributor to daily and weekly newspapers, a co-editor of the quarterly *Nuovi Argomenti*, and the film critic of *L'Espresso*. He writes a more or less definite number of pages every morning in a modern apartment in an ancient section of Rome; incidentally, this to him is not only the result of a natural impulse but also a necessary antidote to a basic sense of boredom. Soldati, on the other hand, while his contributions to periodicals are sporadic, makes most of his living as a film director.

Both novels are in the first person; they use fictional narrators. This device, as any practitioner knows, is an easy temptation because it solves certain problems of point of view and speech, and gives the narrative a sort of *a priori* truthfulness. Both novels here adopt it with a sufficient sense of artistic necessity. Soldati, as in his earlier collection of stories, *A cena col commendatore* ("Dinner with the Knight-Commander;" Milan: Longanesi, 1952), uses as his mouthpiece a character not too vastly different from himself — a man, that is, subtly articulate, temperamental, capable of keen psychological insights. In Moravia's case the "speaker" is a *ciociara*, or woman from the Ciociaria, the pastoral region south of Rome of which Fondi is the main town. In other words, like his earlier "woman of Rome," his protagonist-narrator may "talk too well for a woman of the people."

La ciociara, then, is in Moravia's third manner. The first manner was that of the early novels and short stories which had mainly to do with the Roman upper-middle-class; some readers still consider it Moravia's best, in the treatment for instance of adolescent characters like the hero of the old *Inverno di malato* ("A Sick Boy's Winter," not known in English because it was written before Moravia, and generally Italy, became fashionable) or those of the later *Two Adolescents*. The narrator was the anonymous all-seeing observer, with an implicit touch of the

moralist. The second manner was that of the stories collected in the Bompiani complete works as "surrealist and satiric tales." Moravia has been for at least twenty years a great admirer of Kafka; add to this the fact that, during fascism, an allegorical and cryptographic sort of writing was a way to make a virtue out of necessity. The satiric novel *La mascherata* ("The Fancy Dress Party," a satire on fascism), is the product of that phase which is best known outside Italy, because publishers are generally keen on anything that smacks of topical interest, and make a fatal confusion between the appeal of literature and that of reportage. However, any of the stories contained in the volume cited above, would represent that second manner more satisfactorily. The third, and present manner, is a popular one, from the points of view both of subject matter and reading public; it consists of *The Woman of Rome*, of the present novel, and of dozens of short stories (the series is still running), the "Roman tales." These stories first appear in the daily *Corriere della sera*, generally on Sundays; they are looked forward to by "average readers;" a group of them have been made into a Cinemascope production directed by Gianni Franciolini.

Curiously, while the fictional narrators of the two novels are women, the narrator-hero of the stories is most typically a version of the same recurrent young man, a Roman of the

"lower classes," enterprising, basically amiable, job-chasing, moving among love troubles, petty intrigues, etc. One interesting problem in all of these stories, as well as in the present novel, is that of the adoption, by a "national" literary work, of local speech forms; at times Moravia's narrative can be described as semi-vernacular. This is made workable, of course, not only by the first-person device but also by the fact that the Roman vernacular is particularly close to general Italian.

For its background *La ciociara* can be listed as a war novel; it concentrates, however, on the destinies of two particular women from the Ciociaria, Cesira and her daughter Rosetta. The war compels them to leave Rome, where the mother owns a flourishing store, and try to obtain safety and food among their native mountains. They happen to spend most of the time close to the Garigliano river and to the slowly moving battlefront. The novel then is peopled with characters or local farmers, greedy and opportunistic black-marketeers, stray soldiers of all armies. In spite of his realism, there is a tendency in Moravia to produce symbolic types, characters possessing what he once referred to as a proverbial flavor; thus the principal male character in the novel, Michele, is the Young Idealist, roughly similar to the one in the *Woman of Rome*. A degree of oversimplification does not make him less plausible and truthful; in fact, if

the novel were real life, and the young man had not been killed by the Nazis, he would probably now be sitting in Parliament, classified, say, as Independent Left.

La ciociara has considerable interest as a document of the period and place which it covers (Moravia himself for a time had to seek refuge in very much such a place); naturally it goes beyond that, and declaredly intends to be, above all, the "description of two acts of violence, one collective and the other individual, war and rape." The main victim of the latter act, in the most daringly melodramatic scene in the book, is the daughter Rosetta, raped under the very eyes of the Virgin, in a church, by Moroccan soldiers. The stupefied indifference with which she accepts her following sexual destiny is the simple symbol of the moral aftermath of war and violence. The author is committed to that simplicity by the very choice of the *ciociara* as his heroine and narrator; a novel of this sort stands or falls on our interest in the narrator's outlook and speech. The fascination it may have, and the reason for its probable success, say, among Americans who fought in Italy, is that while it shows events which have been widely reported on and frequently presented in fiction and films, it does so from the visual angle of one of their obscure, anonymous heroines, a strong-willed woman with a taste for story-telling and a tendency to a simple sort of philosophizing. Through

this, many pages of the book (such as the description of the doomed and beautiful Russian soldier dragging two horses not his own and quietly expecting only death; or Cesira's dream vision of Mussolini's and Hitler's destruction, and her own reflections on Liberation) achieve a sort of fresh and genuine greatness.

Soldati's novel, though hardly related to public events, bears, instead, the flavor of post-war moral confusions among the well-to-do. The narrator, who is a bachelor of fifty and a successful lawyer, is called on a job to France and drives through Alpine regions which are particularly dear to his (and Soldati's) heart. In a small winter-sports shop near the border he unexpectedly recognizes, in the shopkeeper's woman companion, Aurora, a lady he had known years before in a totally different milieu: actually, in that mixture of the slick and the ambiguous which is epitomized by certain aspects of the section of Rome called Parioli. He had then known Aurora as the wife of one of his rich clients, later departed for Brazil; and as the object of the desperate and unrequited love of his own best friend, Silvestri. The novel, a short one to be sure, consists of the reconstruction, through dialogue and flashback, of the past history of these people and of the attempt on the part of the narrator to establish the true nature of their relationships. This is done not only with great subtlety, cleverly exploiting the gradual process

of psychological detective work to create suspense; but also with a deep undercurrent of moral preoccupation, the sense of a biting and alert conscience, so that the story of the gradual discovery of "the true Silvestri" becomes, in its limited way, a study on the nature of love and friendship.

Neither *La ciociara* nor *Il vero Silvestri* adds a new dimension to Moravia's and Soldati's work; but this fact can be seen optimistically. Italy has always lacked a sufficient number of novelists who can be counted on to provide, at reasonable intervals, respectable even if predictable books. Routine products such as these can be helpful in establishing more firmly the novel as a popular art and a recognized institution.

[P. M. P.]

WORDS ARE STONES

In his new book *Le parole sono pietre* (Turin: Einaudi, 1956) soon to appear in English translation, Carlo Levi the well-known author of *Christ Stopped at Eboli* returns after a number of years to the poverty-stricken regions of southern Italy that inspired his best work. In his description of this world of the "Mezzogiorno," we find again those qualities that we had missed in his symbolic novel *L'Orologio*, and that are really most genuinely characteristic of him: the ability to set the most insignificant details of the landscape in relief; and what amounts to his real vocation — the illumination

through words and stories of the primitive passions of these peasants.

Levi's destination is Sicily; his objective, to carry out a newspaper assignment and to satisfy his innate curiosity about people and places. But his is not the idle curiosity of the tourist who seeks the picturesque and is carried away by a sunset on the water. His aspiration is to read what is behind these faces closed in an impenetrable silence, and to decipher the age-old secret of Sicily's land, at times so luxurious, at times so barren and primitive. He proceeds on his trip with his eyes wide open, divining behind a simple gesture of the people he meets, a change of mood—anger, resignation, or hope; gathering the drama of life from nature itself, from the permanence of that dazzling light that falls on Sicily like a yellow falcon falling on the countryside covered with stubble. The landscape is never depicted solely for its own sake, but as it complements and illuminates the lives and gestures of those who people it. For the men and the land spring from the same origin, from the same profound vitality, actors perhaps in a remote drama whose words do not reach our ears. And just as these men co-exist with nature and are themselves nature, so rare indeed are their gestures and spoken words, so in nature, life and death co-exist. The blue sky of Sicily, "tragic, ardent, unbelievable," exists beside the calcified bones, the burned skeleton of Monte Pel-

legirino. "Actually in this Sicily where the past is as if annulled by the permanent luminosity of nature, death is itself life. And life is often not different from death."

Levi gives two excellent examples of this global vision of the Sicilian nature which, as it does not know life and death, so it is also ignorant of good and evil. The first is the description, devoid of human sympathy but full of pictorial appreciation, of the owner of a sulphur mine during a strike. His impassive face seems to belong to an age of which we have only an archaic, hereditary memory. It is the face of a man from a prehistoric world.

The second example we find in that magnificent *kermesse funèbre* that is the visit of the writer to the embalmed corpses of the cemetery of the Capuchin monks in Palermo. Here is none of the admonishing warning to the living of the medieval Dance Macabre, but only the presence of the dead among the living. The nicely arranged expressions on the corpse's faces, those bushy, neatly trimmed beards, those multicolored and varied costumes, seem not to want to hide death from the living, but on the contrary to show that death preserves completely in itself the image of life.

Levi knows how to see beyond all social distinctions to the natural and instinctive conflicts in the hearts of his characters. Beyond the problem of wealth and poverty that divides the protagonists into two groups, one armed against the

other, there are the vicissitudes of life and death that are lived with the same ardor indiscriminately by all those who live under the same Sicilian sky. Thus, the most violent expression of the conflict between the miners and the mine owners occurs when the owner's wife finally shouts her real feelings at her opponent: "We'll paper the walls with the money before we give it to you for a raise."

Of course it is a cry of hate, but related to its prehistoric and natural roots, it is a grieving voice born of isolation, of desolate pride, of a solitude from which there is no escape. There is something about it that reminds us of one of Verga's characters, Mazzaro, who, rich and alone, when the hour of his death has arrived, slaughters the cattle in his fields shouting, "my things, you come with me!"

In spite of this and other external similarities of content, however, Levi's writing could not be said to be inspired by Verga. Verga clings to the primitive world he describes, accepting all its premises. His emotion is as if suffocated and imprisoned in a language in which the feelings of the author and those of the characters are almost inextricably fused together. Verga's inspiration tends to burn itself out and end in silence, just as the vitality of his characters burns out in a destiny of solitude and despair. The greatest of Verga's heroes, Mastro Don Gesualdo, dies alone in the palace of his daughter's husband, despised

and rejected by all. Levi, on the contrary, proceeds from the outside to the inside with the style of a chronicler. Starting from a different and higher degree of moral civilization than the world of his characters, he observes them with more detachment and endows them with a more independent and autonomous personality.

The essays that compose this book, to all appearances so disorganized and occasional, are actually arranged in a highly rational and significant order. The book begins with a story in which the external world is described and interpreted by Levi in a humorous key, that is to say in full consciousness of the distance between the writer-critic who observes, and the country which recites its part with naturalness and ease. The book ends with a story in which the writer steps back and lets the actors speak for themselves. The Sicilian adventures of Levi proceed from the fable to the drama, from silence to speech, from nature to consciousness and history. From a nature that knows the implacable force of evil to which for centuries men have opposed only tears, we go on to a new phase in which the tears become words. And the words, through the impassioned voice of a woman whose son has been killed by the Mafia, strike the murderers like stones, breaking an ancient tradition of silence, resignation, and involuntary complicity.

But let us examine this procedure more closely. The first tale in the book is the animated

historical account of the visit of the Mayor of New York, Vincenzo Impellitteri, to his home town of Isnello. (This news story, together with the story of the visit to the Capuchin cemetery, was also published in October 1951 in the American magazine, *The Reporter*.) Already in *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, Levi knew how to reveal, in a truer manner even than Pavese himself, the profound bond that exists between Italians, especially the southern Italian peasants, and America. But while, for the old men who have been in America, America is a real experience and a reason for prestige in the peasant community, for the young, it is a world of evasion and fable. "Let's touch the car," say the boys of Isnello beside the Pontiac of Mayor Impellitteri, "and that way we will all go to America." And the Mayor's arrival entirely fulfills this atmosphere of mythical expectation. The Mayor speaks in a picturesque Sicilian-American dialect, confusing *nascità* with *natività*. But the *natività* which is only used for the birth of a god, seems to convey very well this miraculous atmosphere of myth in which the whole ceremony, from the wait for the Mayor's arrival to his speech, takes place. Everyone recites his part perfectly: the representatives of the local government, the women, the children, the dogs and even the flies. There are many very amusing details; for example the discussion on whether the Mayor was born in house num-

ber 67 or in number 70, and the arrival of the flood of relatives coming from all over Sicily to see their illustrious kin. However, the humor with which Levi confronts and describes the spectacle never becomes irony. While he puts himself outside and above the spectacle, the writer respects the atmosphere of fable, this mysterious and remote communication of souls that takes place between the illustrious Sicilian-American and the population of the village.

After the description of the visit to the cemetery, Levi presents us with a Sicily much more violent and less picturesque. We find again the faces, names and places that have so often made the news since the war. The bandits, the Mafia, the peasants, the feudal lords, become the protagonists of the story. And Levi finds in the mouths of the humble, the voices of redemption and hope. Levi is, with Silone, the writer who has most strongly felt and understood the voice of the peasant population of southern Italy, and he has made himself their interpreter through his writing. For this reason, because of his ambitions as a social writer, he prefers to call his books essays rather than stories, in spite of their strong narrative vigor. And their success, the source of their inspiration lies in the facts themselves rather than in any inventive flights of the imagination. Being an entirely visual writer, Levi is incapable of inventing the plot of a story or of adorning the truth. The facts

speak for themselves. He is only concerned with bringing them to light and establishing their relationships of light, tone and color, or with revealing in an impassive face a human warmth that has been hidden or suffocated. His characteristic method of working is precisely from the exterior toward the interior, and in this he is different from many other writers who have preceded him in Italy and from many of his contemporaries. We have referred above to Verga, whose voice as a writer is as if suffocated and burned out gradually as the human horizon of his protagonists becomes more and more restricted and every hope is shut out of their lives. But we could also speak of a contemporary writer from southern Italy, Domenico Rea. By adhering to the sentimental and verbal world of his Neapolitan heroes, he follows them in their imaginative and baroque language, in their attempt at a lyrical escape from their daily lives, with a technique seemingly opposite but analogous to that of Verga. We could say that such writers are limited by the excessive stylistic and human sympathy they feel for their characters; while a writer like Levi is limited by the lack of concentration, the abnormal extension that is the very nature of the chronicle. Still, whatever be the limit implicit in the literary form or the practical concern of Levi, we must admit that the pages of narrative dealing with the violent death of the peasant leader,

Salvatore Carnevale, as told by his mother, are to be counted among the most epic and most beautiful of Italian post-war literature.

[Dante Della Terza]

MAZZINI

Professor Gaetano Salvemini is best known to the general American academic public as one of those expatriates who, like G. A. Borgese, Carlo Sforza, Enrico Fermi, and Alberto Tarchiani, fled Italy after the advent of Fascism to write and teach abroad. But long before Mussolini's march on Rome Salvemini had a substantial reputation in the fields of political theory and the philosophy of history. As early as 1905 he had written one of the best books on Mazzini's place in the wider sphere of nineteenth-century political thought. Salvemini's book was reprinted in 1925, and the present English translation by I. M. Rawson is the third edition. (*Mazzini* by Gaetano Salvemini, Stanford: University Press, 1957).

As Salvemini himself stated when his book first appeared, Mazzinian studies were then in their infancy. Since that time much impressive research has been forthcoming. Not only have Italian scholars produced a national edition of Mazzini's works and letters, but scholarship on the Mazzini theme, even in the United States, has increased continuously. In recent years we have produced here Joseph Rossi's *The Image of America in Mazzini's Writ-*

ings (1954) and E. E. Y. Hales' *Mazzini and the Secret Societies* (1956). In Italy the year 1955-56 saw the publication of Alessandro Levi's *Mazzini*, and in France Maria dell'Isola and George Bourgin's *Mazzini*. Mazzini's life and thought lend themselves to an international approach to scholarship. His political and intellectual contacts transcended the *Risorgimento* environment in which he lived and worked.

The reader gains from this book some indication of Mazzini's world-wide pervasiveness and significance. Salvemini shows how Mazzini was himself influenced by writers of the Romantic movement, and he indicates the great Italian patriot's relationship with the growing Socialist élan outside Italy. While Mazzini was a man of many moods, the essential brilliance of his principles comes through in this latest edition of Salvemini's sometimes equally penetrating analysis. Treated are such facets of Mazzini's thought as his criteria of truth, the foundations of his beliefs, his attitudes toward education and religion, his concepts of liberty, revolution, and democ-

racy. It was Mazzini who gave us perhaps our best definition of democracy, which Salvemini does not quote: "Democracy," he once said, "is the progress of all through all under the leadership of the wisest and the best." In many respects the patriot qualified as a good democrat in an age of oppression against the forces of democracy.

The Stanford University Press is to be complimented in bringing out a new English edition of this lasting work. The typography, done in Great Britain, is attractive and easy to read. It is regrettable that Professor Salvemini was unable to revise his book along the lines indicated in his preface for the 1925 edition. The volume stands, however, as a substantial contribution to scholarship. In the author's words it is, indeed, "still of use, not only to students of the Italian *Risorgimento*, but to those interested in the development of nineteenth-century social ideas . . ." The book unfortunately suffers from the lack of an index which could have been provided by the publishers.

[Andrew F. Rolle]

ITEMS

CARLO GOLDONI is naturally the center of the yearly Theatre Festival in his native Venice, this year marking the 250th anniversary of the playwright's birth. Culturally and geographically, Venice has always been a crossroads of civilizations and languages; the Goldoni celebrations in July and August follow that cosmopolitan tradition and constitute an international *hommage à Goldoni*, with total disregard of language barriers, as well as of iron curtains.

Performances alternate between the "Green Theatre" on the island of St. George across the lagoon from St. Mark, and the historic Fenice Theatre in town. *Il Campiello*, produced by Carlo Lodovici, opened the series on July 5th. Then, the following were presented: *Le baruffe chiozzotte*, staged by the Zagreb National Theatre; *La vedova scaltra*, in the production of the German Group of the Bochum Schauspielhaus; *Il servitore di due padroni*, in the National Polish Theatre production; *Un curioso accidente*, offered by the Teatro Experimental de Oporto. The Rumanian Popular Theatre produces *I rusteghi*, while the French Company of the Grenier

(Toulouse) stages *La locandiera*. This major part of the Festival concludes with *L'impresario delle Smirne*, staged by one of the most celebrated Italian directors, Luchino Visconti.

The flourishing of experimental university theatres in Italy as well as in other European countries has been a characteristic of the postwar years. These too offer their contributions to the Goldoni festivities from August 6 to 13 in the Palazzo Grassi Theatre. The Barcelona Experimental Theatre will present their own production of *Il servitore di due padroni*, the Experimental Theatre of Zagreb will produce *Il feudatario*, and an English company from Leeds will stage *Le donne di buon umore*. These last two companies, in true experimental tradition, have selected plays which are otherwise very seldom shown. The same criterion seems to have guided in their choice the members of Venice's own student theatre which will close the series, the Teatro di Ca' Foscari; they will produce an "anthology" of little known scenes from Goldoni under the name of *La Venezia di Goldoni*.

AN INFORMATIVE and intelligently prepared volume, which contains Galileo's *Starry Messenger*, *Letters on Sunspots*, *Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina*, and excerpts from *The Assayer* has been published by Doubleday: *Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo*, translated with an Introduction and Notes by Stillman Drake. Each selection is preceded by an introduction which combines facts of Galileo's life and an explanation of the selection. It was the author's purpose to "present in substantially Galileo's own words both the astronomical discoveries that made him famous and the philosophical opinions that cost him his freedom." Two of the works included, (*Letters on Sunspots* and *The Assayer* [of which only certain excerpts are included] had never appeared before in English; the other two were translated many years ago but have become practically unobtainable. The reader may recall that in 1953 Mr. Drake published his translation (the only complete one in English) of Galileo's *Dialogue Concerning the Two World Systems*.

SCANDALO DELLA SPERANZA a book of essays by one of Italy's most widely known literary critics, Carlo Bo, is receiving a reception normally accorded to best selling novels. A convinced Christian, Mr. Bo surveys the cultural scene of contemporary Italy in terms of the fundamental problems of knowing

oneself. His conclusions point out that among our daily sufferings and evil deeds, in a period of unrelenting materialism, there always remains the unexpected, "scandalous" appearance of Christian hope as the real solution to our problems.

CARLO COCCIOLI the indefatigable writer and traveler is returning to Europe after more than two years in Latin America. His latest book *Manuel il Messicano* which has already received wide acclaim in Latin America will soon appear in an Italian version published by Vallecchi. Also to appear very soon, in France, is the first volume of Coccioli's *Intimate Diary*.

ORIO VERGANI'S latest "psychological" novel *Udienza a porte chiuse* ("Inquest behind closed doors") has been announced by its publisher Rizzoli of Milan.

GIOSUÈ CARDUCCI will be commemorated on the 50th anniversary of his death by a series of ceremonies under the auspices of the University and the City of Bologna. For the occasion the Casa Zanichelli, the original publisher of the great poet, plans to complete the publication of Carducci's letters which will appear during the year in 21 volumes.

Also scheduled for publication are a volume on the poetical itinerary of Carducci and a commentary on Carducci's poetical words under the direction of E. Palmieri, P. P. Trompeo and M. Valgimigli.

●

JUVENILE POETS have found a spokesman in Italy such as they have in France with Minou Drouet. Giovanni Serafini, twelve years old, has written a volume of lyrics which "have nothing of the prematurely intellectual but are the candid poetic expression of a true child." The book entitled *Barchette di carta* ("Paper Boats") has been published by Mondadori. The volume has a preface by Francesco Flora the "discoverer" of Serafini. Giovanni has recently been awarded a special prize by the Libera Stampa of Lugano; he also gave a lecture *Pascoli and Children* during the latest commemoration of this poet at San Mauro.

●

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CATHOLICISM and fictional literature has been hardly as important and fruitful in Italy as it has been in France or in England. Two among the notable exceptions, for their special awareness of that relationship in terms of themes and problems, are Antonio Fogazzaro in the time between the late nineteenth century and the twentieth, and

Guido Piovene in our own; both writers, incidentally, are from Vicenza, a fact which could be proved indicative in terms of local cultural history.

As is well known, one of the most famous episodes in the history of the relationship between writers and Church authority in Italy was the condemnation of Fogazzaro's novel *Il Santo* (1906), followed by the author's submission. Recently Guido Piovene has been shown in the Municipal Library at Troyes an unpublished letter written by Fogazzaro on May 19, 1906, to his French translator, Georges Hérelle, which throws interesting light on the author's position at that time: "I don't know," Fogazzaro wrote, "how you judged my conduct after the condemnation of *Il Santo*. I do not ask you; I only wish to tell you that by submitting to Church discipline without retracting, I did, and intended to do, what Benedetto (the hero of the novel) would have done. I am completely unaware of the motives for the condemnation, and I shall continue to write along the same line of ideas." In publishing the letter in *La Stampa* (2 April 1957) Guido Piovene draws a parallel between Fogazzaro's position and that of French Catholic intellectuals of the present day; many French writers and theologians, he maintains, could make Fogazzaro's letter their own.

●

LAST ISSUE in these same columns an important exchange was reported between Ignazio Silone and Ivan Anisimov (director of the Moscow Institute of World Literature): "Un dialogo difficile: dal disgelo al neo-stalinismo," *Tempo presente* (February 1957). It may now be read in excerpt, translated into English and published in the excellent English monthly *Encounter* (June 1957).

DANTE STUDIES continue to arouse great interest in the Anglo-American world. Two of the latest additions are *Dante and the Early Astronomers* by M. A. Orr, a book well known to Dante scholars for many years, now reappearing in a new edition by Wingate of London; the other *The Age of Dante* by Domenico Vittorini, published by the Syracuse University Press, reviews the developments of this dynamic period and traces them to their culmination in the Divine Comedy.

DIEGO FABBRI, one of the most original playwrights of contemporary Italy who aroused such great interest a few years back with his unusual play *Processo a Gesù* ("Jesus on Trial"), has just published another play *Veglia d'armi* ("Knight's Vigil") with Vallecchi. The play, first performed in the Summer of 1956 with great success, takes up again Fabbri's favorite theme: the sense and value of Christianity in the modern world.

CLASSE OPERAIA E PARTITO ("Working Class and the Party," Laterza, 1957) by Fabrizio Onofri is a lucid attempt to explain the increasing split between the communist party members and the leaders of that party in Italy. The book points out clearly the reluctance of Italian communists to follow along the road of Lenin's teaching that capitalist society must first be destroyed and then rebuilt along Marxist lines. Actually the book is a tacit admission of the ever diminishing appeal to Italians of communist "revolutionary" ideology as opposed to "traditional" concepts of life. The author, for many years an active communist labor leader, has rejected the labor policies of the party and is openly at odds with the leaders of communism in Italy.

ARTURO LORIA'S last book *Settanta Favole* ("Seventy Fables"), published posthumously by Sansoni of Florence, concludes the literary career of one of the strongest upholders of Italian literary tradition. Loria, who died last February, had begun his career and had played his most important role in modern Italian culture in the early thirties in connection with the review *Solaria*. This review, the first vehicle of expression for such writers as Moravia, Tecchi, Vittorini, was during its existence one of the few serious and vigorous manifestations of devotion to literature in the otherwise desolate atmosphere engendered by fascism.

THE MOVIES remain a favorite topic among non-fiction writers in Italy. Three new books on the subject have appeared recently: *Annuario del cinema italiano 1956-57* ("Year Book of the Italian Cinema 1956-57"), full of detailed factual information, is a useful reference book; *Un leone d'oro* ("A Golden Lion") is the story of the last Film Festival of Venice, hence the title. Written by two men who had an active part in the organization and management of the Festival, Fernando di Giammatteo a member of the Committee charged with the selection of films to be shown, and Giambattista Cavallaro who was a member of the selecting jury, the book gives a good accurate report of behind-the-scenes rivalries and differences among committees, producers, directors and other interested parties; *Il nuovo cinema italiano* ("The New Italian Cinema") by Giuseppe Ferrara is the latest attempt to explain and understand the new direction taken by Italian movies since the end of the last war.

ALDO PALAZZESCHI one of the most vigorous writers of Italy's "last generation" will offer a complete edition of all his short stories. The publisher is Arnoldo Mondadori and the voluminous book should prove very revealing since many of the stories have never been published before. Incidentally, the manuscript was prepared with customary painstaking care by

the author in his own handwriting.

BOTTEGHE OSCURE has just published its 19th number. As usual it contains a varied and interesting cross-section of world writing. In the Italian section we call attention to the first chapter from a forthcoming novel *Gli eredi* ("The Heirs") by P. M. Pasinetti.

THE ITALIAN SCENE, the bulletin of the Cultural Division of the Italian Embassy, has suspended circulation. We hope this interruption is only temporary. To Dr. Uguccione Ranieri di Sorbello, who has been its editor, we offer our thanks for a lively and interesting publication.

ATTRAVERSO I SECOLI a new reader by Domenico Vittorini, published by Holt and Co., reached us just as we were going to press, and thus we were unable to examine it closely. But even a cursory perusal made it immediately clear that this is the best looking Italian textbook ever published in this country. We are looking forward to a leisurely enjoyment of its rich and intelligent choice of illustrations.

CURZIO MALAPARTE, one of the most controversial and picturesque figures of contemporary Italy, died recently in Rome. Born Kurt Suckert, in

Prato, Tuscany, of a German father and an Italian mother, he was for many the *bête noire* of Italian letters. He possessed a flair for D'Annunzio's dashing concept of life, and resembled Papini for his lack of conformity in style. Probably none of his books, as a whole, will long survive his memory, but a great number of his pages will live for a long time. His evocative and incisive manner of writing could wander from the intimate tone of conversation to unrestrained lyricism, from mordant satire to realism often disgustingly lurid. Sensationalism, paradoxes, a deceptive cool detachment which really hid a passionate partisanship; these were probably the most evident ingredients of his writing, the very same elements to be most bitterly attacked by his critics. A volunteer in the first World War at the age of 16, he joined the Fascist party at its inception only to fall in disgrace in the early thirties and was sent to the "confino" for 5 years. He managed to regain grace as the second World War was breaking out, and he was sent with Italian troops to Russia as a journalist. The experiences of this period he narrated in his well known book *Kaputt* which created a sensation in the numerous editions and translations it had. Upon his return to Italy he was at first arrested by the Allies and then released and named liaison officer between Italian and Allied troops. In *La Pelle* ("The Skin") he recounted the vicissitudes of this interlude with a

cynicism and sordid realism more often than not in extremely poor taste.

After a brief parenthesis in the movies, as producer, director and script-writer all in one, he returned to writing, and his last book *Maledetti Toscani* ("Damned Tuscans") went a long way to redeem him from the unsavory reputation he had acquired with *La Pelle*.

His illness was prolonged and death came slowly amid extreme physical pain. Born and brought up as a Protestant, Malaparte was never a very religious man. On his death-bed, however, he became converted to Catholicism through the efforts of a priest personally sent by the Pope to his bedside.



LE CARTE PARLANTI, for many years the weekly bulletin of information published by Vallecchi Editore of Florence, is now appearing in a much improved and more complete magazine format. The magazine will be a monthly publication, and judging from the first number which appeared in May, it should prove quite useful and interesting.



THE AMERICAN DIVISION of the Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento offers a prize of \$200 for the best unpublished study in the history of Modern Italy, of article or essay length. The award will be made at the December 1958 meeting of the American His-

torical Association. Further details may be secured from Professor Howard R. Marraro, Casa Italiana, Columbia University, New York 27, New York.



THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT has appointed two national commissions for the collection, editing and publication of definitive editions of the correspondence of Camillo Ben-

so di Cavour and Giuseppe Garibaldi. Anyone having any information concerning the existence of unpublished letters from or to Cavour or Garibaldi in any American public or private libraries or archives, is urged to contact the Executive Secretary of the American Division of the Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento Italiano, Professor Howard H. Marraro, Casa Italiana, Columbia University, New York 27, New York.



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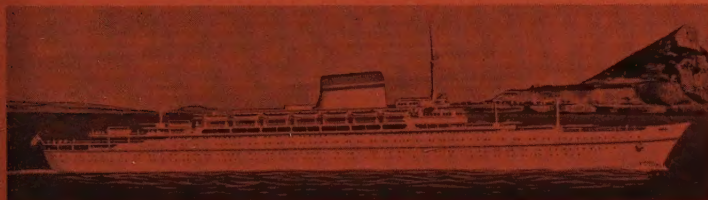
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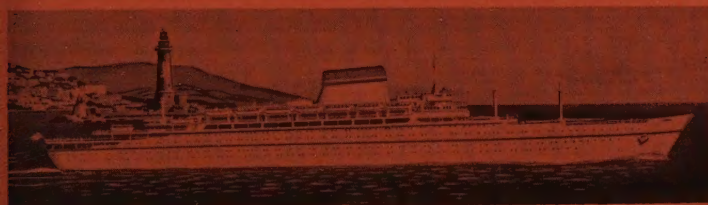
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